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SALEM - 636 011

CENTRE FOR DISTANCE AND ONLINE EDUCATION

(CDOE)

M.A ENGLISH

SEMESTER - II

CORE VI: WORLD SHORT STORIES

(Candidates admitted from 2024 onwards)

Prepared by

Centre for Distance and Online Education (CDOE),

Periyar University, Salem – 636 011.

LIST OF CONTENTS

II Semester Hours/Week: 150

24DPEN08 Credits: 5

CORE VI

WORLD SHORT STORIES

Course Objectives:

- To understand the origin and development of short story.
- To appreciate the creative nuances of writers across the world recognizing and appreciating the multiplicity of voices.
- To evaluate the influence of literary, cultural and historical contexts of short stories.

Course Outcomes:

On Successful completion of the course, the students will be able to

CO1- Inculcate the interest of reading and articulate the value assumptions through short stories - K1and K2

CO 2 - Improvise communication skills by LSRW method - K3, K4 and K5

CO 3 - Enrich the word power and vocabulary of English language (K3)

CO4 - Induce the art of creative writing and make them to understand how short stories can express individual and human values within a particular historical context. K4

CO5 - Import classical, romantic and modern style short stories and demonstrate awareness of the scope and variety of short stories that focus on gender, class and race. K5

Unit I

The Roots of Modern Short Stories - Realism and Short Stories – Writers of 1930s, 1940s and 1950s

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Francis Richard Stockton : A Lady or the Tiger

Edgar Allan Poe	:	The Fall of the House of the Usher
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R.K.Narayan	:	A Horse and Two Goats
Rama Chandra Behera	:	The Passenger
Kalki	:	The Poison Cure
Khuswant Singh	:	Karma

Book Prescribed:

Mysor, Frank. *The Modern Short Story*. 4th ed., Cambridge, 2007.

References:

1. *Short Stories of Yesterday and Today* – Shiv K.Kumar

2. *Daughter of Man and Other Stories*. Ed. by Prof. S. Anthony Sivam and Dr.K. Gunasekaran
3. Kumar, Shiv K. *Short Stories of Yesterday and Today*, OUP, 1992.

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Unit I

CORE VI - WORLD SHORT STORIES

UNIT I

LESSON 1: THE ROOTS OF MODERN SHORT STORIES - REALISM AND SHORT STORIES – WRITERS OF 1930S, 1940S AND 1950S

1.1 ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF SHORT STORY

Story has been existing since the dawn of the human civilization. Different kinds of stories prevail: stories, tales, fables, parables, anecdotes and folk-tales in different languages in all countries. However, the short story differs from them. Only the common aspect is story telling. The impulses behind short story and other types of stories are the same viz.

(1) The curiosity to know others

(2) The desire for self assertion and

(3) Love for storytelling and listening.

Oral and written stories were found in the ancient times. Initially oral stories existed giving place to written stories. Afterwards such stories were called tales and they occur in The Old Testament and The New Testament. Most of the early stories were written in verse. The first short prose stories appeared during the Renaissance period. Its example is Robert Greene's The Conney Catching Tracts.

In the beginning of the eighteenth century, short stories began to appear in the periodicals such as The Tatler, The Spectator, The Adventurer, etc. A short story is a fictional prose form and it has developed besides the novel. The modern short story in its real sense of the term is a work of art. It is distinct literary form from the earlier types of stories. The modem short story originated in the second quarter of the nineteenth century in America, but its precursors are the earlier tales of adventures, the legends: mythologies, the tales told in the epics like The Ramayan and The Mahabharatha, Aesopes Fables and Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels.

The short story is relatively a new literary fictional prose form. It has a brief history of 150 years only. The American writer Edgar Allen Poe is regarded as the father of the modern short story and the publication of his story MS Found in a Bottle in 1833 is the first modern short story. His stories are known for his skill of narration and the local colour. His technique was different from the earlier short story literature. E.A. Poe gave his concept of the theory of short story writing in 1842 in his review of Nathenial Hawthorn's' Twice Told Tales, a collection of short stories.

The other famous short story writers in U.S.A. are Ambrose Bierce, O Brierce, Bret, Harte and Henry James. The short story passed on from U.S.A. to Europe including England. Well known European masters of short story in different countries are : Guy de Maupassant and Balzac (France), Anton Chekhov and Leo Tolstoy (Russia), Sir Walter Scott and Mrs. Gaskel (England).

Indians such as Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R.K. Narayan have also written short stories in English as well as in their regional languages. It seems that the extreme mechanisation of life due to heavy industrialisation is the root cause ofthe birth of the modem short story. Readers have no leisure to read longer novels and to witness longer dramas at a stretch in the modem times.

Naturally, they depend on modem genre of short story to satisfy their love of the creative arts in one sitting of 15 to 20 minutes. The fragmentariness of the short story suits to the fast life in modem times as an entertainment. The spread of education for the masses and consequently the rise of the magazines and periodicals helped the development of short story and its popularity in the public.

Every magazine required short stories for its every issue and thus short story became a separate and special feature of every periodical: weekly, fortnightly, monthly and quarterly. The stories in the periodicals provided the kind of entertainment the readers required. H.E. Bates remarks in this regard, "Even today the magazines are full with different short stories".

1.2 ELEMENTS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF SHORT STORIES

Short stories tend to be less complex than novels. Usually, a short story will focus on only one incident, has a single plot, a single setting, a limited number of characters, and covers a short period of time. In longer forms of fiction, stories tend to contain certain core elements of dramatic structure:

exposition (the introduction of setting, situation and main characters);

complication (the event of the story that introduces the conflict);

rising action, crisis (the decisive moment for the protagonist and their commitment to a course of action);

climax (the point of highest interest in terms of the conflict and the point of the story with the most action); resolution (the point of the story when the conflict is resolved); and moral.

1.2.1 DEFINITIONS

The short story is a crafted form in its own right. Short stories make use of plot, resonance and other dynamic components as in a novel, but typically to a lesser degree. While the short story is largely distinct from the novel or novella/short novel, authors generally draw from a common pool of literary techniques. The short story is sometimes referred to as a genre.

Determining what exactly defines a short story remains problematic. A classic definition of a short story is that one should be able to read it in one sitting, a point most notably made in Edgar Allan Poe's essay "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846). H. G. Wells described the purpose of the short story as "The jolly art, of making something very bright and moving; it may be horrible or pathetic or funny or profoundly illuminating, having only this essential, that it should take from fifteen to fifty minutes to read aloud." According to William Faulkner, a short story is character-driven and a writer's job is to "...trot along behind him with a paper and pencil trying to keep up long enough to put down what he says and does."

Some authors have argued that a short story must have a strict form. Somerset Maugham thought that the short story "must have a definite design, which includes a point of departure, a climax and a point of test; in other words, it must have a plot". Hugh Walpole had a similar view: "A story should be a story; a record of things happening full of incidents, swift movements, unexpected development, leading through suspense to a climax and a satisfying denouement."

This view of the short story as a finished product of art is however opposed by Anton Chekhov, who thought that a story should have neither a beginning nor an end. It should just be a "slice of life", presented suggestively. In his stories, Chekhov does not round off the end but leaves it to the readers to draw their own conclusions.

Sukumar Azhikode defined a short story as "a brief prose narrative with an intense episodic or anecdotal effect".Flannery O'Connor emphasized the need to consider what is exactly meant by the descriptor short. Short story writers may define their works as part of the artistic and personal expression of the form. They may also attempt to resist categorization by genre and fixed formation.

In the 1880s, the term "short story" acquired its modern meaning – having initially referred to children's tales. During the early to mid-twentieth century, the short story underwent expansive experimentation which further hindered attempts to comprehensively provide a definition. Longer stories that cannot be called novels are sometimes considered "novellas" or novelettes and, like short stories, may be collected into the more marketable form of "collections", of stories previously unpublished or published, but elsewhere.Sometimes, authors who do not have the time or money to write a novella or novel decide to write short stories instead, working out a deal with a popular website or magazine to publish them for profit. Around the world, the modern short story is comparable to lyrics, dramas, novels and essays – although examination of it as a major literary form remains diminished.

1.2.2 LENGTH

In terms of length, word count is typically anywhere from 1,000 to 4,000 for short stories; however, some works classified as short stories have up to 15,000 words.

Stories of fewer than 1,000 words are sometimes referred to as "short short stories", or "flash fiction".

Short stories have no set length. In terms of word count, there is no official demarcation between an anecdote, a short story, and a novel. Rather, the form's parameters are given by the rhetorical and practical context in which a given story is produced and considered so that what constitutes a short story may differ between genres, countries, eras, and commentators. Like the novel, the short story's predominant shape reflects the demands of the available markets for publication, and the evolution of the form seems closely tied to the evolution of the publishing industry and the submission guidelines of its constituent houses.

1.2.3 SHORT STORY STRUCTURE

• Create a narrative lead: to show the main character in action, dialogue, or reaction.

• Introduce the main character.

• Introduce the setting: the time place, and relationships of the main character's life.

• Introduce and develop the problem the main character is facing.

• Develop the plot and problem towards a climax for e.g. a decision, action, conversation , or confrontation, or confrontation that shows the problem at its height.

• Develop a change in the main character: o e.g. an acknowledgement of understanding of something, a decision, a course of action, a regret.

• Develop a resolution: o how does the main character come to terms – or not – with his or her problem?

1.2.4 SHORT STORY TERMINOLOGY

1. Atmosphere – the general mood, feeling or spirit of a story.
2. Characterization – the way that the author creates characters.
3. Protagonist – the main character who is faced with a problem.
4. Antagonist – the person, place, idea or physical force against the protagonist.

5. Climax – the point of the highest dramatic intensity; the turning point.
6. External conflict – happens outside the character.
7. Internal conflict – happens inside the character; (character vs. himself/herself)
8. Foreshadowing – clues of hints which prepare the reader for future action or events.
9. Irony – contrast or contradiction of what is expected and what results.
10. Verbal irony – occurs when a character or narrator says one thing but means the opposite.
11. Dramatic irony – occurs when the reader knows more than the character.
12. Situational irony – occurs when the contrast between what appears to be and what actually exists.
13. Plot – action of the story.
14. Chronological – places events in order of time from first to last.
15. Flashback – looks back at events that have already occurred.
16. Point of View – the angle from which the author tells the story.
17. First Person Narrative – the narrator uses “I” and participates in the action.
18. Third Person Narrative – the narrator uses “he” and “she” and is an outside observer.
19. Omniscient – narrator can see, know and tell all of the characters of a story.
20. Limited Omniscient – narrator can only see, know and tell all of one character.
21. Objective – narrator describes the characters statements but doesn’t reveal thoughts or feelings.
22. Resolution – the outcome of a story.
23. Setting – the background where the action takes place.
24. Suspense – anticipation as to the outcome of events.
25. Symbol – a similar object, action, person, or place or something else that stands for something abstract

1.3 A BRIEF HISTORY OF AMERICAN SHORT STORIES

The development and rise of the American short story in the nineteenth century was the result of simple market forces. As Urban populations in America were so

unstable, workers moved from city to city as new lands and employment opportunities arose, newspapers found that serializing novels was bad business. British novelists like Charles Dickens and Anthony Trollope published their novels first in serial form, and then collected the chapters together to sell as a book. American novelists had very few venues for serialization, which is why the shape of the American literary novel differs so radically from its British counterpart: chapters from serialized novels read like episodes of soap operas—each chapter opens with a crisis that is soon resolved and closes with the introduction of a new crisis or cliffhanger which will be resolved at the beginning of the next installment. It was not the case with American novcels such as Moby Dick and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

With no periodical market for the novel in the U.S., writers of fiction in the first half of the nineteenth century borrowed the form of the short tale from German authors such as Wilhelm Kleist and E.T.A. Hoffmann and altered the form to suit American newspapers. The result was the literary form what is known as the short story.

1.4 A BRIEF HISTORY OF BRITISH SHORT STORIES

History of the British short story as a genre begins with Daniel Defoe's "A True Relation of the Apparition of One Mrs. Veal" (1706). It raises the issue of "fact" versus "fiction" so emphatically that it can serve as exemplary of many of the discriminants between the novel and the short story.

The first single work of short fiction in English literature to have a marked effect on the short story form that followed it, a work that perhaps set the tone for all nineteenth-century English short fiction, is Horace Walpole's "The Castle of Otranto" (1765).

During the romantic period short stories developed with Charles Lamb's "Dream Children" (1822), because of its narrative movement and its management of time between the present and the past, is a central example of the emergence of the short story from the essay.

Sir Walter Scott's insert tale in *Redgauntlet,* often anthologized as "Wandering Willie's Tale" (1824), forms an interesting bridge between the traditional folk tale in

which confrontations with the devil are the stock-in-trade and the later British mystery story in which the supposed supernatural is accounted for in a grotesque but naturalistic way.

In the Mid- Eighteenth Century short stories developed in the form of Mystery Tales. Wilkie Collins's "The Traveller's Story of a Terribly Strange Bed" (1856) is a particularly clear example of the realistic drive toward the understanding and naturalizing of the supposed supernatural—a drive that becomes as much a part of the narrative interest as the underlying mystery itself.

Edward Bulwer Lytton's story "The Haunted and the Haunters; or, The House and the Brain" (1859), embodies a central theme in nineteenth-century British short fiction in which a projection of the mind is so taken to be real that the blurring of the lines between the physical and the spiritual becomes a predominant motif and manner of presentation.

To name some of the Victorian short stories are George Eliot's "The Lifted Veil" (1859), an interesting example of what happens when a novelist in the realist tradition turns her hand to the short fiction form, is better looked at as a typical irrealistic short story than as an atypical realistic novel.

Charles Dickens's story "The Signalman" (1866), makes use of the techniques of the later turn-of-the-century short story and poses the problem of genre: Are we to read it as a ghost story, as a spiritualist story of precognition, as a symbolic story, or as a psychological story?

Next in the list are the Modern Fantasy stories.Walter de la Mare has been called the most distinguished of the writers who made the Edwardian age a "haunted period" in English literature. For de la Mare, only the imagination makes reality significant, and what we call external reality itself is like a dream—a characteristics of the short story genre itself that can be seen most readily in de la Mare's two best-known and most anthologized stories, "The Creatures" and "The Riddle" (1923).

Saki (H. H. Munro) marks a shift in Edwardian short fiction to the trick ending story that dominates popular short stories both in England and America at the turn of

the century. His most anthologized story, “The Open Window” (1914), is a clear example of a fiction that depends for its impact on the means by which story itself works.

The most notable short story writer of the twentieth century is Robert Louis Stevenson. It is no coincidence that the first British writer to be recognized as a specialist in the short story is also the champion of the romance form in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Nor is it coincidence that this short-story specialist was one of the first British short-fiction writers to focus, as did Henry James, on technique and form rather than on content alone. The writer of course is Robert Louis Stevenson, and many critics suggest that it is with his work that the true modern short story began in England.

What Stevenson has done in “A Lodging for the Night” (1877), is to create a story about the artist who transforms reality into art, even as Stevenson himself transforms the details of the story into art. The story is an exercise in just this seeming paradox, indicating that reality must be dealt with both in terms of practical existence and the ambiguous mixture of amusement and horror, for life and death must be mocked in order to transform them into art at all.

In “The Sire de Maletroit’s Door” (1877), Stevenson gives us the very essence of poetry, for it focuses on the conventional romance situation even as it comments on the nature of the romantic tale as a genre

“Markheim” (1884), radically foregrounds the dichotomy inherent in fiction between character and event. Rather than focusing on form because he had little content of value to communicate, as some critics have claimed, Stevenson, like Henry James, is primarily concerned with the structure and essential nature of fiction itself.

Rudyard Kipling was perhaps the first English writer to embrace the characteristics of the short story form whole-heartedly; thus his stories are perfect representations of the transition point between the old-fashioned tale of the nineteenth century and the modern short story.

1.5 A BRIEF HISTORY OF INDIAN ENGLISH SHORT STORIES

The short story in the Indian sub-continent followed a more or less similar pattern of growth as it did in Europe and America. The development of English short story has been developed with the relation of human with nature and struggle of human being.

The history of Indian English short story is not very old. Indian English short story was published in 1898 for the first time. The name of the story collection was ‘Stories from Indian Christian Life’. The remarkable book was written by Kamala Sathianadan. In fact the Indian writers used to focus only social problems in their short stories but later the scenario of the stories was changed. The writers made new experiments in the stories.

Now writers tried to portray the story with description, the characters are deeply introduced to the readers besides, the family background of the characters, social and educational set up, psychology of the characters were described very well. Indian short story in English was written systemically in India after 1920.That was the age of Gandhian philosophy where people influenced by Gandhi’s thoughts. Gandhi’s Shankar Ram wrote, ‘The children of Kaveri’ in 1926. He depicts the Indian problems like superstitions, poverty, and caste system. His other remarkable story is ‘Creatures of All show’ written in 1933.

The short story writers focused burning issues of India in their stories. A.S.P. Ayyer, K.S. Venkatramani, and K.Nagarjan were social reformers. This period was under the influence of Gandhi, and national movement-freedom thoughts were started aggressively at that time. The short story in Indian writing in English may, on a superficial level, be called an offshoot of the Indo-Anglian novel. Right from Raja Rao down to Arun Joshi, every Indo-Anglian novelist, has produced at least one, collection of short stories. At the same time, there are writers like Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan who are equally prolific in the realms of the short story and the novel. They have contributed much to the emergence of the short story in English as a distinct genre and entity. It was only during the last four decades that the short story developed into a full-fledged mode of creative expression in the hands of great masters who took keen and serious interest in it as an art-form. The bulky output of Mulk Raj Anand, Manjeri S.

Isvaran, R.K. Narayan, Khushwant Singh, and others in the form of short stories reveal their dedication to its development. Today, the Indian short story in English has very well served as a powerful vehicle of social awareness and a tool of painting the Indian social scene.

1.6 LET US SUM UP

A short story is a piece of prose fiction. It can typically be read in a single sitting and focuses on a self-contained incident or series of linked incidents, with the intent of evoking a single effect or mood. The short story is one of the oldest types of literature and has existed in the form of legends, mythic tales, folk tales, fairy tales, tall tales, fables and anecdotes in various ancient communities around the world. The modern short story developed in the early nineteenth century.

Self Assessment Questions:

Two Marks:

Describe the key features of realist literature, and how did they influence the development of the short story genre?

Realist literature is characterized by its accurate depiction of everyday life, ordinary people, and the mundane aspects of reality. This movement rejected romanticism's emphasis on emotion and imagination, instead focusing on objective, truthful representation. Realism's influence on the short story genre led to the creation of more concise, direct narratives that explored the human condition in a more nuanced way.

Discuss Gustave Flaubert's writing style contribute to the development of modern short stories?

Flaubert's writing style, as seen in his short stories like "A Simple Heart," introduced a more objective, neutral narrative voice. He also experimented with non-linear storytelling and explored the inner lives of his characters. Flaubert's innovations

influenced later writers to adopt more innovative and experimental approaches to the short story form.

How did Guy de Maupassant's short stories exemplify realist principles?

Maupassant's stories, such as "The Necklace," epitomized realism's focus on everyday life and ordinary people. His writing style was marked by simplicity, clarity, and a lack of sentimentality. Maupassant's stories often explored the human condition, revealing the complexities and flaws of his characters in a nuanced, unsentimental way.

Explain the significance of the realist movement in literature?

The realist movement marked a significant shift away from romanticism's emphasis on emotion and imagination. Realism's focus on objective truth and everyday life paved the way for later literary movements like naturalism and modernism. Realism's influence can still be seen in contemporary literature, with many writers continuing to explore the human condition in a nuanced, realistic way.

Explicate Ernest Hemingway's writing style influence the development of the short story genre?

Hemingway's distinctive writing style, characterized by simplicity, clarity, and a focus on concrete, descriptive details, influenced a generation of writers. His use of understatement, sparse dialogue, and emphasis on action over introspection created a new kind of narrative that was both concise and powerful.

Discuss the World War II play in shaping the writing of J.D. Salinger?

Salinger's experiences during World War II had a profound impact on his writing. His stories, such as "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," often explored themes of alienation,

disillusionment, and the struggle to maintain innocence in a corrupt world. Salinger's writing reflected his own experiences and observations during the war.

Comment on how Eudora Welty's short stories explore the American South and its social issues?

Welty's stories, such as "A Worn Path," often explored the complexities of life in the American South, delving into themes like racial tension, social change, and the decline of traditional values. Her writing was characterized by a deep understanding of the region and its people, as well as a nuanced exploration of the human condition.

What was the significance of Albert Camus's contribution to the short story genre?

Camus's writing, influenced by existentialism, introduced a new kind of narrative that explored the absurdity and uncertainty of human existence. His stories, such as "The Stranger," often featured isolated protagonists struggling to find meaning in a seemingly indifferent world. Camus's influence can be seen in later writers who explored similar themes of existential crisis.

Five Marks:

1. Mention the key writers associated with the development of realism in short stories, and what were their notable works?

2. What are the defining characteristics of realism in literature?

3. Analyze a short story from the realist period (e.g., Maupassant's "The Necklace") and explain how it exemplifies realist principles.

4. Imagine you are a writer in the realist tradition. Write a short story that reflects the social and cultural issues of your time, using realist techniques.

5. Describe the historical events influenced the short story genre during this period?

6. Compare the writing styles of two short story writers from this period (e.g., Hemingway and Salinger). How did their experiences shape their writing?

7. Explain how the Great Depression and World War II impacted the themes and tone of short stories during this period.

Eight Marks:

1. Choose a short story from this period (e.g., Hemingway's "The Snows of Kilimanjaro") and analyze its themes, characters, and literary devices.

2. Inscribe a short story set during the 1930s-1950s, incorporating historical events and cultural influences of the time.

3. Summarize the main differences between romanticism and realism in literature, using examples from short stories.

4. Clarify how realism reflected the social and cultural changes of the 19th century in short stories.

5. Pen down some notable short story writers of the 1930s-1950s, and what were their significant contributions?

Unit II

American Literature

UNIT II AMERICAN LITERATURE

LESSON 2: FRANCIS RICHARD STOCKTON: A LADY OR THE TIGER

2.1 AUTHOR INTRODUCTION

Frank Stockton (1834-1902) was an American novelist and short story writer of mainly humorous fiction, best known as the author of the title story of a collection called *The Lady, or the Tiger?* (1884).

Stockton refused to study medicine as his father wished and became a wood engraver. He contributed to and was on the staff of *Hearth and Home* and in 1873 became assistant editor of the *St. Nicholas Magazine.* His earliest fiction was written for children. Among his most popular children's stories were those collected in *Ting-a-Ling Tales* (1870) and *The Floating Prince, and Other Fairy Tales* (1881).

His adult novel *Rudder Grange* (1879), originally serialized in *Scribner's Monthly,* recounted the whimsically fantastic and amusing adventures of a family living on a canal boat. Its success encouraged two sequels, *Rudder Grangers Abroad* (1891) and *Pomona's Travels* (1894). *The Casting Away of Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine* (1886) told of two middle-aged women on a sea voyage to Japan who become castaways on a deserted island. A sequel appeared in 1888 as *The Dusantes.* Though he continued to write some juvenile fiction, Stockton wrote mostly for adults after 1887. He also wrote a book of history, *Buccaneers and Pirates of Our Coast* (1898).

2.2 TEXT INTRODUCTION

Frank Stockton's short story "The Lady, or the Tiger?" first published in 1882, tells the story of a "semi-barbaric" princess who is thrown into a difficult situation: having to decide whether her lover will marry another woman, or face a ravenous tiger.

Frank Stockton first wrote the story (originally titled "In King's Arena") in order to provoke discussion at a literary party. It received such a positive reception from his peers that he formally published it in *Century Magazine* in July 1882. It immediately met

with resounding success. Since then, as journalist Fred Abrams noted in 1977, Stockton's story "has fascinated generations of Americans."

Many readers have wondered at the solution to the story's central question. Stockton himself refused to give away the answer while he was still alive. In his book *A Critical Biography,* Stockton's biographer Martin IJ Griffin notes that "Stockton refused to reveal the solution to the problem when questioned directly." His response to such questions was generally the following: "'If you decide which it was—the lady, or the tiger—you find out what kind of person you are yourself.'"

2.3 SUMMARY

Stockton's "The Lady, or the Tiger?" is set in a kingdom ruled by a semi-barbaric king who is a fanciful and unpredictable man. The king has built up a justice system that is based entirely on chance. He has built a public arena where men accused of a crime must choose one of two doors. Behind one of the doors is a lady; behind the other is a tiger. If the prisoner chooses the door with the tiger, he is assumed to be guilty, and he will be eaten in front of the entire kingdom. On the other hand, if he chooses the door with the lady, he is presumed innocent, and he marries the lady right there on the spot.

The king's beautiful daughter has a personality that is very similar to his. Unbeknownst to him, she falls in love with a courtier, who is far below her in status. When the king finds out about this relationship, he is enraged. He puts the courtier on trial and will let his system of "poetic justice" decide the youth's fate. He searches his kingdom for the most ferocious tiger and the most beautiful lady. On the day of the courtier's trial, everyone in the kingdom gathers in the amphitheater.

When the courtier steps into the amphitheater, he bows to the king but his eyes are on the princess. He knows the princess's character and knows that she would have gone to great lengths to know what each door is concealing. The princess also knows the identity of the lady hiding behind the door: it is a beautiful lady of whom the princess is quite jealous. The courtier and the princess's eyes meet. He asks her with a glance which door he should choose. The princess makes a miniature gesture towards the door on the right. The courtier marches forward and chooses that door without hesitation.

We are not told what was behind the door that the princess chose for her former lover. Did she choose to send him to death in order to avoid giving him away to another? Or, in order to spare her lover's life, did she seal her own heartbreak to watch the one she loves marry another? In the end, the question is posed to the reader: what do you think came out of that door? The lady, or the tiger?

The princess, king, and youth who appear in the story never existed, and are merely products of an author’s imagination. So, too, then, are their fates, including the unspecified fate of the youth who loved the princess. Most stories are what the French literary theorist Roland Barthes calls *readerly* texts: they provide the reader with everything he or she needs to understand the story, and the reader can passively sit back and simply enjoy being entertained.

2.4 CHARACTER LIST

2.4.1 THE KING

The character with the most power in "The Lady, or The Tiger?" is the king. He is described by the story's narrator as being "semi-barbaric." He comes from a long line of barbaric ancestors but has also been educated by his Latin neighbors. This leads to certain contradictions in the way that he thinks. The narrator explains that the king's ideas, "though somewhat polished and sharpened by the progressiveness of distant Latin neighbors, were still large, florid, and untrammeled" (45). The king is prone to "exuberant fancy" and has so much power that he can often turn his "varied fancies into facts" (45). The king does not ask others for advice and instead merely clears his decisions with himself: "when he and himself agreed upon any thing, the thing was done" (45).

The king's character is "bland and genial" no matter what happens in the kingdom, even when things are going wrong (45). This is because even when things are off-course, nothing pleases the king so much as to make things right.

The king is fond of the idea of the public arena, an idea which has come from the kingdom's Latin neighbors. The king has built an enormous arena in his kingdom where he tries men who have been accused of a crime. Those men, who are important enough

to interest the king, must choose between two doors: one of which hides a tiger that will eat him and the other of which hides a lady whom the man will immediately marry. The king's power is so absolute that it does not matter if the man is already married or does not want to marry the maiden. The king does not let anything come in the way of his form of justice: "the king allowed no such subordinate arrangements to interfere with his great scheme of retribution and reward" (46).

When the king finds out that his daughter is in love with a courtier, he sends his courtier to trial in the public arena. The king, as well as the rest of the kingdom, knows that the courtier has already committed the crime of loving the princess. However, the king will not let anything interfere with his tribunal, "in which he [takes] such great delight and satisfaction" (48).

2.4.2 THE PRINCESS

The princess is the beautiful daughter of the king. Like her father, she is half barbaric and half civilized. She is like her father in character; the narrator notes that she has "a soul as fervent and imperious as [the king's] own" (47). The king loves his daughter more than any other person.

The princess falls in love with a member of the king's court who is below her in status. She sees very many good qualities in her lover and loves him "with an ardor that had enough of barbarism in it to make it exceedingly warm and strong" (47).

When the king finds out about their affair and sentences the princess's lover to trial, her character compels her to find out what is hiding behind each door in the arena. Her barbarism also draws her to watch the event herself: "her intense and fervid soul would not allow her to be absent on an occasion in which she was so terribly interested" (48). The princess has been consumed with thoughts about the trial and has not thought of anything else for several nights and several days.

Not only does the princess discover which door is hiding the lady and which the tiger, but she also finds out the identity of the lady whom her lover would be forced to marry. As it happens, the princess despises this lady: "with the intensity of the savage

blood transmitted to her through long lines of wholly barbaric ancestors, she hated the woman who blushed and trembled behind that silent door" (49).

Ultimately, the princess's lover asks her with a glance which door he should choose. She subtly points towards the door on the right. The princess's choice—whether to send her lover to his death or to be forced to watch him marry another—is at the center of the psychological question posed by "The Lady, or The Tiger?" The princess has lost her lover forever, but will she allow another to have him? Knowing what you know about the princess, what do you think?

2.4.3 THE COURTIER

The young man with whom the princess falls in love is a member of the king's court. He is handsome and brave. As the narrator of the story notes, his character is very similar to the love interest found in countless romances throughout history: "Among [the king's] courtiers was a young man of that fineness of blood and lowness of station common to the conventional heroes of romance who love royal maidens" (47).

This young man has done something that no other person in his kingdom has ever done before: he dared to love the princess. As a result of his crimes, he is sent to trial, where he must choose a door hiding a lady or a tiger. The king thinks this is an appropriate solution to the courtier's crime—even though the whole kingdom knows what he did—because either way the problem of the courtier will be solved. Either he will be killed, or he will be married to another.

2.4.4 THE LADY BEHIND THE DOOR

When the princess's lover enters the arena, he must choose one of two doors. One of them hides a lady whom the princess knows and hates. She is "one of the fairest and loveliest of the damsels of the court" (49). Not only is she incredibly beautiful, but she has also demonstrated interest in the courtier in the past. The princess has "seen, or imagined that she had seen, this fair creature throwing glances of admiration" towards the courtier (49).

2.5 THEMES

2.5.1 BARBARISM VS CIVILIZATION

The question of barbarism vs civilization is a major theme in "The Lady, or the Tiger?" Throughout the story, characters are described as "barbaric" to the extent that they are not easily controlled and are given to extreme emotional passion. In contrast, they are described as "civilized" insofar as their behavior is seen as educated and refined.

The king is equal parts barbaric and civilized. Thus, he is "semi-barbaric." In other words, neither force gains the power to determine his character completely. The civilized half of his character has been influenced by "distant Latin neighbors" who have helped to polish and sharpen his ideas (45). Additionally, he has adopted the idea of the public arena from his Latin neighbors. This method of judgment also reduces his barbarism. Despite this, the barbaric half of the king's character is obvious. His ideas are "large, florid, and untrammeled" and he is "a man of exuberant fancy" (45). Whatever the king decides on becomes a fact as a result of his great power.

The most immediate expression of the king's barbarism is how he uses the idea of the public arena in his kingdom. Rather than make it a place where the kingdom can enjoy a public celebration or the arts, he turns it into the kingdom's court of justice. In the public arena, prisoners must choose between two doors, leaving their fate up to chance. Should the prisoner choose the door hiding a tiger, the entire kingdom must then witness the prisoner's bloody death. This form of "justice" reflects the king's barbarism, as he greatly enjoys the spectacle of watching the prisoner be forced to unwittingly choose his own fate. The narrator explains how the arena works: "the fate of the accused person would be decided in the king's arena, a structure which well deserved its name, for, although its form and plan were borrowed from afar, its purpose emanated solely from the brain of this man, who, every barleycorn a king, knew no tradition to which he owed more allegiance than pleased his fancy, and who ingrafted on every adopted form of human thought and action the rich growth of his barbaric idealism" (46).

Like the king, the kingdom is "semi-barbaric" as well. The king's subjects greatly enjoy this system of justice, which appeals to their barbarism but which also "refine[s]" and "culture[s]" their minds (45).

The king's daughter, the princess, is also "semi-barbaric." The narrator describes her as a young woman "as blooming as [the king's] most florid fancies, and with a soul as fervent and imperious as his own" (47). The princess's barbarism causes her to passionately love her lover: "she loved him with an ardor that had enough of barbarism in it to make it exceedingly warm and strong" (47). It is thanks to the princess's barbarism that she is in the arena watching her lover choose his fate: "had it not been for the moiety of barbarism in her nature it is probable that lady would not have been there, but her intense and fervid soul would not allow her to be absent from an occasion in which she was so terribly interested" (48). Additionally, the princess's barbarism is what causes her to hate the lady hiding behind the door whom her lover might wed: “The girl was lovely, but she had dared to raise her eyes to the loved one of the princess; and, with all the intensity of the savage blood transmitted to her through long lines of wholly barbaric ancestors, she hated the woman who blushed and trembled behind that silent door” (49).

Because "The Lady, or the Tiger?" ends on a question, we are not sure if the princess succumbed to the "barbaric" or "civilized" side of herself. The "barbaric" side would likely have influenced her to send her lover to his death over having to share him with a lady whom she hates. Her "civilized" side might have led her to save him, choosing her own heartbreak over her lover's death. Because these attributes are equally strong inside of the princess, as they are in her father, it is hard to tell which door she chose.

2.5.2 JUSTICE

"The Lady, or the Tiger?" depicts a unique form of "justice" which we do not often see represented in contemporary society. What marks the form of justice in the king's arena is that it is completely up to chance. No one decides the fate of the prisoner; it depends on nothing but his own luck. In this way, it is also impartial: luck or chance does not care which door the prisoner chooses. In the story, the narrator refers to this

kind of justice as a "poetic justice" in which the fate of the prisoner is decided by "an impartial and incorruptible chance" (45-6). That chance cannot be "corrupted" means that those in power do not have a say over the outcome of the trial and every prisoner is given an equal opportunity to save their own life—except, of course, when the princess gets involved.

According to the narrator of "The Lady, or the Tiger?" this form of justice is perfectly fair: "Its perfect fairness is obvious. The criminal could not know out of which door would come the lady: he opened either he pleased, without having the slightest idea whether, in the next instant, he was to be devoured or married. On some occasions, the tiger came out of one door, and on some out of the other" (47). The prisoner's fate is also immediately decided and set in stone, and therefore cannot be changed. He is married or murdered right there in front of the entire kingdom.

Thus, readers are left with an interesting question: is this form of justice truly "fair"? Is it fairer than the justice that we see in the modern world, where the fate of an accused person is decided by a judge or jury? In our current system of justice, there is the worry that the accused fate will be hindered by the jury's biases. Though there are often procedures in place to check that bias (e.g. screening a jury, choosing jury members that do not have personal stakes in the trial, etc), the court can never be certain that these procedures are 100% effective. In the end, those with more power are often given more of a say and different people receive different kinds of justice in the courtroom.

Is a justice that is based on chance any better? Obviously, it is not—innocent prisoners might be sent to their death simply because they had been accused of a crime. Similarly, guilty prisoners might be rewarded simply because they happen to choose the door that is hiding the princess. The only benefit to this kind of justice system seems to be the fact that it is "impartial" and "incorruptible"—but is it, really? The princess, thanks to her power, is able to corrupt the justice system and mold it to her own ends.

The princess's intrusion in the "perfect fairness" of this justice system also offers its own message. Because she is so powerful, she is able to use her power to discover

what is behind each door. No one in the kingdom has ever done this before, not even her father. As a result, the fate of her lover is not left up to chance but is instead completely in her hands. She has the power to save him or send him to his death depending on her will. Perhaps the message of the princess's intrusion is that justice can never really be impartial as long as it is being dealt out by humans. Humans have a natural tendency to have biases, knowingly or unknowingly, and there will always be someone with enough power to tip the scales of justice in their favor.

2.5.3 POWER

Hand-in-hand with the theme of justice comes the theme of power. Because this story is about the workings of a kingdom, we are given a setting in which a few characters (i.e. the king and the princess) are given great power, and the rest of the characters (i.e. the subjects) have very little. The king has so much power, in fact, that the quality of life of his subjects is entirely dependent on his fancy. As the narrator tells us, the king is powerful enough that every single one of his whims can be converted into fact: "He was a man of exuberant fancy, and, withal, of an authority so irresistible that, at his will, he turned his varied fancies into facts. He was greatly given to self-communing; and, when he and himself agreed upon any thing, the thing was done" (45).

He has the power to decide whether or not his subjects will prosper or suffer. In fact, the kind of justice that each subject receives is dependent upon whether the king is interested in their case: "When a subject was accused of a crime of sufficient importance to interest the king, public notice was given that on an appointed day the fate of the accused person would be decided in the king's arena" (46). The king has the power to upend tradition as he pleases and make new traditions of his own. The narrator writes, the king "knew no tradition to which he owed more allegiance than pleased his fancy" (46). Additionally, because the king takes so much pleasure in his justice system, he does not allow anything to postpone the spectacle of the punishment or the reward: "It mattered not that [the prisoner] might already possess a wife and family, or that his affections might be engaged upon an object of his own selection; the king allowed no such subordinate arrangements to interfere with his great scheme" (46). For anyone who might be stepping into the king's arena, "there was no escape" (47).

There is only one character in the story whose power matches that of the king. That is his daughter, the princess, who is able to completely subvert the king's system according to her own interests. Because of her great power, she is able to figure out which door is hiding the princess and which door is hiding the tiger: "Possessed of more power, influence, and force of character than any one who had ever before been interested in such a case, she had done what no other person had done,—she had possessed herself of the secret of the doors. . . [G]old, and the power of a woman's will, had brought the secret to the princess" (48). Here, it is suggested that the princess's power is not only in her status but also in her gender: it is thanks to her "woman's will" that she is able to discover the secret.

The princess's discovery of the truth has given her a power that no one—not even the king—has before possessed in the kingdom. She now has the power to determine whether her lover lives or dies. Her lover goes confidently, without doubt, in the direction that the princess sends him: "Without the slightest hesitation, he went to the door on the right, and opened it" (50). In this way, the princess's power is absolute. She holds an entire life in her hands. This power is what makes the central question of "The Lady, or the Tiger?" so interesting. She has upended the "perfect justice" of the king's arena and has turned it instead into a matter of her own will. Very few people will ever hold that much power. It is hard to imagine what someone with that much power would choose.

2.5.4 HUMAN NATURE

Another theme of "The Lady, or the Tiger" is human nature. In fact, the story's question depends upon the reader's understanding of human nature more than anything else. The story does not give us a definite answer to the question of the young man's fate at the end of the story: that question is left for readers to interpret and judge for themselves. The reader's judgment about what happens at the end of the story depends entirely on what they think the princess will do.

As the narrator tells us, "the more we reflect upon this question, the harder it is to answer." Deciding whether the princess chooses her lover's death or her lover's marriage to another "involves a study of the human heart which leads us through

devious mazes of passion, out of which it is difficult to find our way" (50). In fact, as the narrator tells us, we cannot think about this question in terms of what we would do ourselves; instead we must consider the character of "that hot-blooded, semi-barbaric princess, her soul at a white heat beneath the combined fires of despair and jealousy" (50). The princess, who is so powerful, nonetheless does not have the power to decide who she can love. Here, her power has failed. As the text asks, "she had lost him, but who should have him?" (50).

The fact that the princess gestures towards the door on the right without hesitation does not mean that she had not spent countless days thinking about the question of which door to choose. In fact, "she had known she would be asked" and prepared her decision accordingly (50). In order to answer this question, the reader must know the princess intimately—something that is impossible to do. The narrator himself does not know the answer. He writes, "[t]he question of her decision is not one to be lightly considered, and it is not for me to presume to set myself up as the one person able to answer it" (50). As a result, he leaves the question with us readers. We each will have our own interpretations of the princess's decision, depending upon how we have read her character.

2.6. MOTIFS

2.6.1 LOVE

Love is a major motif throughout "The Lady, or the Tiger?" Every prisoner that enters the king's arena has a 50% chance of opening a door that holds a lady whom he will immediately marry. However, this union is not based on love. In fact, as the narrator points out, it does not matter if the prisoner is in a relationship with another woman: "It mattered not that he might already possess a wife and family, or that his affections might be engaged upon an object of his own selection: the king allowed no such subordinate arrangements to interfere with his great scheme of retribution and reward. The exercises, as in the other instance, took place immediately, and in the arena" (46).

In other words, those who are subject to the king's power are not given true freedom to love fully. The starkest example of this is the princess, who, even though she is the king's favorite person, cannot choose her own lover. The princess falls in love

of her own accord: "Among [the king's] courtiers was a young man of that fineness of blood and lowness of station common to the conventional heroes of romance who love royal maidens. This royal maiden was well satisfied with her lover, for he was handsome and brave to a degree unsurpassed in all this kingdom" (47). The princess loves the courtier passionately: "she loved him with an ardor that had enough of barbarism in it to make it exceedingly warm and strong" (47). Despite this, however, when the king finds out about the affair he puts her lover in jail and subjects him to the trial of the arena. It is thus in the princess's hands to decide whether her lover lives and marries another, or dies.

Is love truly possible within a system such as this one? Anyone but the king who falls in love must live with the knowledge that their love is vulnerable to destruction at any moment. Should something go wrong and one of the lovers be sent to trial, the relationship will be automatically destroyed. Either the lover will be killed, or he will be forced to marry another.

2.7 SYMBOLS

2.7.1 THE KING'S ARENA

The king's arena is a symbol of absolute power and of the passions of the soul. The king builds this arena for the purpose of carrying out his unique system of justice that is entirely based on chance. However, the princess corrupts the impartiality of this system when she takes it upon herself to discover what each door is hiding. Thus, it is suggested that impartial justice can never exist and that power corrupts justice in the end.

The king's arena also symbolizes something else: the human soul. The description of the architecture of the arena is similar to that of the princess's psyche. The narrator describes the king's arena: it is a "vast amphitheater, with its encircling galleries, its mysterious vaults, and its unseen passages" (45). Later, he extends his description: "[t]hrough these thick doors, heavily curtained with skins on the inside, it was impossible that any noise or suggestion should come from within to the person who should approach to raise the latch of one of them" (48).

Later in the story, the narrator describes human nature using similar terms: "The more we reflect upon the question, the harder it is to answer. It involves a study of the human heart which leads us through devious mazes of passion, out of which it is difficult to find our way" (50). Note that both the arena and the princess's character are described as labyrinths in which one can easily get lost. This suggests that the king's arena is a tool through which we learn about—and question—human nature, which is ultimately unknowable. "The Lady, or the Tiger?" has no concrete conclusion because we do not know the princess's soul—not even the narrator has that power—and thus, like a prisoner who is wandering the hallways of the amphitheater, we are in the dark about what the truth might be.

2.7.2 THE DOORS

There are two doors in the king's arena. One door hides a tiger that will eat whoever opens it. The other hides a lady who will immediately be married to whoever opens it. These doors function as symbols within the world of "The Lady, or the Tiger?" On the first level, they symbolize life and death. Because humans do not know the future, we can never truly be sure whether the decisions that we make will lead to our salvation or our destruction.

In this way, the doors also are symbolic representations of free will. The prisoner is given the choice as to which door he will choose. He does not know the outcome of his choice until there is no escape from it. This is very similar to how we live our lives. We always have the power to choose how our life turns out, but we will not know the outcome of that choice until it is happening to us in real time. The exercise of free will will always be a gamble between a likely outcome based on reasoning and the absolute unknown.

2.8 IRONY

2.8.1 VERBAL IRONY

2.8.1.1 THE KING'S BEHAVIOR

"When every member of his domestic and political systems moved smoothly in its appointed course, his nature was bland and genial; but whenever

there was a little hitch, and some of his orbs got out of their orbits, he was blander and more genial still, for nothing pleased him so much as to make the crooked straight, and crush down uneven places" (45).

The line above constitutes verbal irony because it subverts the reader's expectations for how the sentence should end to comic effect. The coordinating conjunction "but" suggests to the reader that the king's behavior will change from "bland and genial" to something less agreeable when things are not going his way. Instead, the narrator informs us that the king becomes even more bland and genial when things veer off course, since he finds great pleasure in making things right. This gives us a funny view of the king and inserts a humorous tone early in the story that ironizes the king and underlines the fact that he does not generally act in an expected manner.

2.8.1.2 PERFECT FAIRNESS

"This was the king's semi-barbaric method of administering justice. Its perfect fairness is obvious" (47).

Depending on the reader, the use of "perfect fairness" in the passage above could constitute verbal irony. The system of justice as the king designs it leaves the fate of prisoners up to chance. However, as the story shows us, this system is not perfectly fair. In fact, it can be corrupted by those who have enough power to do so, such as the princess. Additionally, contemporary readers—including readers from Stockton's time—might raise their eyebrows at the idea that a system of justice that is based on chance and deals out punishments or rewards arbitrarily is "perfectly fair." What about prisoners who are falsely accused of crimes? Also, what about prisoners who are obviously guilty but nevertheless chose the door with the reward?

2.8.2 SITUATIONAL IRONY: THE OLDEN-TIMES VS THE PRESENT

“Never before had such a case occurred; never before had a subject dared to love the daughter of the king. In after years such things became commonplace enough, but then they were in no slight degree novel and startling” (47).

This passage is a moment of situational irony that gives us a bit of the voice of the narrator. In the first line of "The Lady, or the Tiger?" the narrator situates us in "the

very olden time" (45). The reader expects for the story to be entirely situated in this "olden time" as they are given elements that are commonly associated with fairy tales, such as a princess, her handsome lover, and a terrifying beast. Despite this, the narration brings us to the present with the passage above to comic effect. In the same breath, the narrator asserts the uniqueness of the situation in the story and then subverts that very uniqueness by saying that readers today will find it "commonplace enough." The result is a humorous moment that distances the narrator from the events of the story and introduces a contemporary or modern point of view.

2.9 IMAGERY

2.9.1 THE KING'S ARENA

Stockton uses imagery to describe the king's arena early in the story. The narrator notes that the arena is a "vast amphitheater, with...encircling galleries...mysterious vaults, and...unseen passages" (45). This imagery underlines the purpose of the arena, which is meant to leave justice up to chance. In order for that to happen, no one must have knowledge of what each door hides. The four adjectives in the passage above emphasize humans' relationship with this arena: their power is subverted in the face of its "vast," "encircling," "mysterious," and "unseen" structure. Additionally, these adjectives emphasize the lack of knowledge that this system of justice conditions.

2.9.2 WEDDINGS IN THE ARENA

Stockton uses a lot of imagery when describing the typical wedding ceremony in the arena. When the prisoner chooses the door that hides the lady, the celebrations immediately begin: "a priest, followed by a band of choristers, and dancing maidens blowing joyous airs on golden horns and treading an epithalamic measure, advanced to where the pair stood, side by side, and the wedding was promptly and cheerily solemnized" (46). In the passage above, we are given visual and auditory descriptions of what a wedding ceremony in the arena entails. Additionally, the image of the man and wife standing "side by side" symbolizes their union at this juncture in their lives. We are also given the multitude's response to this celebration: "the people shouted glad hurrahs, and the innocent man, preceded by children strewing flowers on his path, led

his bride to his home" (47). The imagery in these passages gives us a clear grasp of what these celebrations were like, painting a vibrant and multi-textured image of the ceremony in our minds as we read.

2.9.3 THE PRINCESS' FEARS

"Would it not be better for him to die at once, and go to wait for her in the blessed regions of semibarbaric futurity?

And yet, that awful tiger, those shrieks, that blood" (50).

In the passage above, the princess is debating with herself as to whether she should save her lover or let him be devoured by the tiger. The second line contains important imagery: "those shrieks, that blood." This short line gives us what the lover being mauled by a tiger would sound and look like, which brings us to that moment. It also tells us what will affect the princess most should this violence occur. The succinctness of the line emphasizes the dramatic effect of what it contains—it is a gruesome scene that would surely be horrifying to watch, especially if it is your lover who is being mauled to death by a tiger.

2.10 LET US SUM UP

"The Lady or the Tiger" is a short story without resolution. Set in a kingdom ruled by a semi-barbaric king, the story centers around the king's approach to justice. Any subject who commits a crime of sufficient interest is summoned to the royal arena where they choose their fate by picking between two doors. Behind one door is a fierce tiger that will eat the person alive, and behind the other door is a fair maiden to whom they will be married at once; the fate of the individual is determined by chance.

One day, the king finds out that his daughter has fallen in love with a brave, sincere young man. However, he is not of royal birth. Enraged by this, the king summons him to the arena to determine his fate. Meanwhile, the princess uses her guile and bribery to gain knowledge of the doors' arrangement and that the woman behind the one door has previously aroused jealousy in the princess. Knowing this information, the princess signals for her lover to open the door to the right. The entire kingdom waits to see what the door hides: the lady or the tiger.

The unique aspect about this story that is unlike other short stories, is that the reader does not know what is behind the door on the right. What do you think?

LESSON 3: EDGAR ALLAN POE- THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER

3.1 AUTHOR INTRODUCTION

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) was a magazine editor, a poet, a short story writer, a critic, and a lecturer. He introduced the British horror story, or the Gothic genre, to American literature, along with the detective story, science fiction, and literary criticism. Poe became a key figure in the nineteenth century.

His name has since become synonymous with macabre tales like “The Tell-Tale Heart,” but Poe assumed a variety of literary personas during his career. *The Messenger*—as well as *Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine* and *Graham’s*—established Poe as one of America’s first popular literary critics. He advanced his theories in popular essays, including “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846), “The Rationale of Verse” (1848), and “The Poetic Principle.” In “The Philosophy of Composition” Poe explained how he had crafted “The Raven,” a poem that made him nationally famous. In the pages of these magazines, Poe also introduced a new form of short fiction—the detective story—in tales featuring the Parisian crime solver C. Auguste Dupin. The detective story follows naturally from Poe’s interest in puzzles, word games, and secret codes, which he loved to present and decode in the pages of the *Messenger* to dazzle his readers. The word “detective” did not exist in English at the time when Poe was writing, but the genre has become a fundamental mode of twentieth century literature and film. Dupin and his techniques of psychological inquiry have informed countless sleuths, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes and Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe.

3.2 A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO GOTHIC FICTION

Gothic fiction involves fear and haunting. The name refers to Gothic architecture of the European Middle Ages, which was characteristic of the settings of early Gothic novels.

The first work to call itself Gothic was Horace Walpole's 1764 novel *The Castle of Otranto*, later subtitled "A Gothic Story". Subsequent 18th-century contributors included Clara Reeve, Ann Radcliffe, William Thomas Beckford, and Matthew Lewis. The Gothic influence continued into the early 19th century; works by the Romantic poets, and novelists such as Mary Shelley, Charles Maturin, Walter Scott and E. T. A. Hoffmann frequently drew upon gothic motifs in their works.

The early Victorian period continued the use of gothic aesthetic in novels by Charles Dickens and the Brontë sisters, as well as works by the American writers Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Later well-known works were *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Twentieth-century contributors include Daphne du Maurier, Stephen King, Shirley Jackson, Anne Rice, and Toni Morrison.

3.2.1 CHARACTERISTICS

Gothic fiction is characterized by an environment of fear, the threat of supernatural events, and the intrusion of the past upon the present. The setting typically includes physical reminders of the past, especially through ruined buildings which stand as proof of a previously thriving world which is decaying in the present. Characteristic settings in the 18th and 19th centuries include castles, religious buildings such as monasteries and convents, and crypts. The atmosphere is typically claustrophobic, and common plot elements include vengeful persecution, imprisonment, and murder. The depiction of horrible events in Gothic fiction often serves as a metaphorical expression of psychological or social conflicts. The form of a Gothic story is usually discontinuous and convoluted, often incorporating tales within tales, changing narrators, and framing devices such as discovered manuscripts or interpolated histories. Other characteristics, regardless of relevance to the main plot, can include sleeplike and deathlike states, live burials, doubles, unnatural echoes or silences, the discovery of obscured family ties, unintelligible writings, nocturnal landscapes, remote locations, and dreams. Especially in the late 19th century, Gothic

fiction often involved demons and demonic possession, ghosts, and other kinds of evil spirits.

3.3 POE AND GOTHIC SHORT STORIES

Gothic literature, a genre that rose with Romanticism in Britain in the late eighteenth century, explores the dark side of human experience—death, alienation, nightmares, ghosts, and haunted landscapes. Poe brought the Gothic to America. American Gothic literature dramatizes a culture plagued by poverty and slavery through characters afflicted with various forms of insanity and melancholy. Poe, America's foremost southern writer before William Faulkner, generated a Gothic ethos from his own experiences in Virginia and other slaveholding territories, and the black and white imagery in his stories reflects a growing national anxiety over the issue of slavery.

3.4 WORK INTRODUCTION

Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Fall of the House of Usher" was first published in 1839 in *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*. This creepy, atmospheric tale is a first-person narrative told by an unnamed narrator who visits his friend Roderick Usher's isolated family manor to support Roderick through a mysterious illness. At publication, the story caused such a stir that it spurred publishers Lea & Blanchard to print a two-volume collection of Poe's short stories called *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* the very next year. It is today considered a Gothic masterpiece and is one of Poe's most popular short stories.

3.5 SUMMARY

An unnamed narrator approaches the house of Usher on a "dull, dark, and soundless day." This house—the estate of his boyhood friend, Roderick Usher—is gloomy and mysterious. The narrator observes that the house seems to have absorbed an evil and diseased atmosphere from the decaying trees and murky ponds around it. He notes that although the house is decaying in places—individual stones are disintegrating, for example—the structure itself is fairly solid. There is only a small crack from the roof to the ground in the front of the building. He has come to the house because his friend Roderick sent him a letter earnestly requesting his company.

Roderick wrote that he was feeling physically and emotionally ill, so the narrator is rushing to his assistance. The narrator mentions that the Usher family, though an ancient clan, has never flourished. Only one member of the Usher family has survived from generation to generation, thereby forming a direct line of descent without any outside branches. The Usher family has become so identified with its estate that the peasantry confuses the inhabitants with their home.

The narrator finds the inside of the house just as spooky as the outside. He makes his way through the long passages to the room where Roderick is waiting. He notes that Roderick is paler and less energetic than he once was. Roderick tells the narrator that he suffers from nerves and fear and that his senses are heightened. The narrator also notes that Roderick seems afraid of his own house. Roderick's sister, Madeline, has taken ill with a mysterious sickness—perhaps catalepsy, the loss of control of one's limbs—that the doctors cannot reverse. The narrator spends several days trying to cheer up Roderick. He listens to Roderick play the guitar and make up words for his songs, and he reads him stories, but he cannot lift Roderick's spirit. Soon, Roderick posits his theory that the house itself is unhealthy, just as the narrator supposes at the beginning of the story.

Madeline soon dies, and Roderick decides to bury her temporarily in the tombs below the house. He wants to keep her in the house because he fears that the doctors might dig up her body for scientific examination, since her disease was so strange to them. The narrator helps Roderick put the body in the tomb, and he notes that Madeline has rosy cheeks, as some do after death. The narrator also realizes suddenly that Roderick and Madeline were twins. Over the next few days, Roderick becomes even more uneasy. One night, the narrator cannot sleep either. Roderick knocks on his door, apparently hysterical. He leads the narrator to the window, from which they see a bright-looking gas surrounding the house. The narrator tells Roderick that the gas is a natural phenomenon, not altogether uncommon.

The narrator decides to read to Roderick in order to pass the night away. He reads "Mad Trist" by Sir Launcelot Canning, a medieval romance. As he reads, he hears noises that correspond to the descriptions in the story. At first, he ignores these sounds

as the vagaries of his imagination. Soon, however, they become more distinct and he can no longer ignore them. He also notices that Roderick has slumped over in his chair and is muttering to himself. The narrator approaches Roderick and listens to what he is saying. Roderick reveals that he has been hearing these sounds for days, and believes that they have buried Madeline alive and that she is trying to escape. He yells that she is standing behind the door. The wind blows open the door and confirms Roderick's fears: Madeline stands in white robes bloodied from her struggle. She attacks Roderick as the life drains from her, and he dies of fear. The narrator flees the house. As he escapes, the entire house cracks along the break in the frame and crumbles to the ground.

3.6 ANALYSIS

"The Fall of the House of Usher" possesses the quintessential features of the Gothic tale: a haunted house, dreary landscape, mysterious sickness, and doubled personality. For all its easily identifiable Gothic elements, however, part of the terror of this story is its vagueness. We cannot say for sure where in the world or exactly when the story takes place. Instead of standard narrative markers of place and time, Poe uses traditional Gothic elements such as inclement weather and a barren landscape. We are alone with the narrator in this haunted space, and neither we nor the -narrator know why. Although he is Roderick's most intimate boyhood friend, the narrator apparently does not know much about him—like the basic fact that Roderick has a twin sister. Poe asks us to question the reasons both for Roderick's decision to contact the narrator in this time of need and the bizarre tenacity of the narrator's response. While Poe provides the recognizable building blocks of the Gothic tale, he contrasts this standard form with a plot that is inexplicable, sudden, and full of unexpected disruptions. The story begins without complete explanation of the narrator's motives for arriving at the house of Usher, and this ambiguity sets the tone for a plot that continually blurs the real and the fantastic.

Poe creates a sensation of claustrophobia in this story. The narrator is mysteriously trapped by the lure of Roderick's attraction, and he cannot escape until the house of Usher collapses completely. Characters cannot move and act freely in the

house because of its structure, so it assumes a monstrous character of its own—the Gothic mastermind that controls the fate of its inhabitants. Poe, creates confusion between the living things and inanimate objects by doubling the physical house of Usher with the genetic family line of the Usher family, which he refers to as the house of Usher. Poe employs the word “house” metaphorically, but he also describes a real house. Not only does the narrator get trapped inside the mansion, but we learn also that this confinement describes the biological fate of the Usher family. The family has no enduring branches, so all genetic transmission has occurred incestuously within the domain of the house. The peasantry confuses the mansion with the family because the physical structure has effectively dictated the genetic patterns of the family.

The claustrophobia of the mansion affects the relations among characters. For example, the narrator realizes late in the game that Roderick and Madeline are twins, and this realization occurs as the two men prepare to entomb Madeline. The cramped and confined setting of the burial tomb metaphorically spreads to the features of the characters. Because the twins are so similar, they cannot develop as free individuals. Madeline is buried before she has actually died because her similarity to Roderick is like a coffin that holds her identity. Madeline also suffers from problems typical for women in -nineteenth--century literature. She invests all of her identity in her body, whereas Roderick possesses the powers of intellect. In spite of this disadvantage, Madeline possesses the power in the story, almost superhuman at times, as when she breaks out of her tomb. She thus counteracts Roderick’s weak, nervous, and immobile disposition. Some scholars have argued that Madeline does not even exist, reducing her to a shared figment Roderick’s and the narrator’s imaginations. But Madeline proves central to the symmetrical and claustrophobic logic of the tale. Madeline stifles Roderick by preventing him from seeing himself as essentially different from her. She completes this attack when she kills him at the end of the story.

Doubling spreads throughout the story. The tale highlights the Gothic feature of the doppelganger, or character double, and portrays doubling in inanimate structures and literary forms. The narrator, for example, first witnesses the mansion as a reflection in the tarn, or shallow pool, that abuts the front of the house. The mirror image in the

tarn doubles the house, but upside down—an inversely symmetrical relationship that also characterizes the relationship between Roderick and Madeline.

The story features numerous allusions to other works of literature, including the poems “The Haunted Palace” and “Mad Trist” by Sir Launcelot Canning. Poe composed them himself and then fictitiously attributed them to other sources. Both poems parallel and thus predict the plot line of “The Fall of the House of Usher.” “Mad Trist,” which is about the forceful entrance of Ethelred into the dwelling of a hermit, mirrors the simultaneous escape of Madeline from her tomb. “Mad Trist” spookily crosses literary borders, as though Roderick’s obsession with these poems ushers their narratives into his own domain and brings them to life.

The crossing of borders pertains vitally to the Gothic horror of the tale. We know from Poe’s experience in the magazine industry that he was obsessed with codes and word games, and this story amplifies his obsessive interest in naming. “Usher” refers not only to the mansion and the family, but also to the act of crossing a -threshold that brings the narrator into the perverse world of Roderick and Madeline. Roderick’s letter ushers the narrator into a world he does not know, and the presence of this outsider might be the factor that destroys the house. The narrator is the lone exception to the Ushers’ fear of outsiders, a fear that accentuates the claustrophobic nature of the tale. By undermining this fear of the outside, the narrator unwittingly brings down the whole structure. A similar, though strangely playful crossing of a boundary transpires both in “Mad Trist” and during the climactic burial escape, when Madeline breaks out from death to meet her mad brother in a “tryst,” or meeting, of death. Poe thus buries, in the fictitious gravity of a medieval romance, the puns that garnered him popularity in America’s magazines.

3.6.1 INTERPRETATIONS

When “The Fall of the House of Usher” was first published in 1839, many people assumed that it was about Poe himself. They observed that the narrator’s description of Roderick also applied to the author:

> A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid,
> and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid, but

> of a surpassingly beautiful curve; a nose of a delicate Hebrew model, but with a breadth of nostril unusual in similar formations; a finely moulded chin, speaking, in its want of prominence, of a want of moral energy; hair of a more than web-like softness and tenuity; these features, with an inordinate expansion above the regions of the temple, made up altogether a countenance not easily to be forgotten.

Contemporary readers and critics interpreted the story as a somewhat sensationalized account of Poe's supposed madness. Later scholarship pursued alternative interpretations. Some scholars speculated that Poe may have attached special importance to the fact that Roderick and Madeline are twins, noting that Poe previously investigated the phenomenon of the double in "Morella" (1835) and "William Wilson" (1839). Other scholars pointed to the work as an embodiment of Poe's doctrine of *l'art pour l'art* ("art for art's sake"), which held that art needs no moral, political, or didactic justification.

3.6.2 CONTEXT AND LEGACY

Poe was often dismissed by contemporary literary critics because of the unusual content and brevity of his stories. When his work was critically evaluated, it was condemned for its tendencies toward Romanticism. The writers and critics of Poe's day rejected many of that movement's core tenets, including its emphasis on the emotions and the experience of the sublime. Poe's contemporaries favoured a more realistic approach to writing. Accordingly, commentaries on social injustice, morality, and utilitarianism proliferated in the mid-19th century. Poe conceived of his writing as a response to the literary conventions of this period. In "The Fall of the House of Usher," he deliberately subverts convention by rejecting the typical practices of preaching or moralizing and instead focusing on affect and unity of atmosphere.

When Poe began writing short stories, the short story was not generally regarded as serious literature. Poe's writing helped elevate the genre from a position of critical neglect to an art form. Today Poe's short stories are lauded as masterpieces of fiction. "The Fall of the House of Usher" stands as one of Poe's most popular and critically examined stories.

3.7 CHARACTER LIST

3.7.1 RODERICK USHER

As one of the two surviving members of the Usher family in “The Fall of the House of Usher,” Roderick is one of Poe’s character doubles, or doppelgangers. Roderick is intellectual and bookish, and his twin sister, Madeline, is ill and bedridden. Roderick’s inability to distinguish fantasy from reality resembles his sister’s physical weakness. Poe uses these characters to explore the philosophical mystery of the relationship between mind and body. With these twins, Poe imagines what would happen if the connection between mind and body were severed and assigned to separate people. The twin imagery and the incestuous history of the Usher line establish that Roderick is actually inseparable from his sister. Although mind and body are separated, they remain dependent on each other for survival. This interdependence causes a chain reaction when one of the elements suffers a breakdown. Madeline’s physical death coincides with the collapse of both Roderick’s sanity and the Ushers’ mansion.

3.7.2 MADELINE USHER

Madeline is Roderick’s twin sister, who at the onset of the story is dying of a mysterious disease. Roderick describes the illness as cataleptic, meaning that Madeline suffers from trances or seizures that render her stiff and unconscious. Madeline is an enigmatic character; whose brief appearances raise many questions and few solid answers. Even the narrator finds her frightening appearance difficult to rationalize away, with the one glimpse he has of her leaving him in awe and fear. While the narrator is generally able to find a logical explanation for most strange events, he calls his reaction to seeing Madeline “unaccountable,” which has led some scholars to believe only the supernatural can explain her apparent illness. After Madeline’s interment, Roderick mentions that “sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed between them,” another vague and intriguing description. This ineffable bond between the twins could simply refer to how they both sicken at the same time or explain Roderick’s unwillingness to leave the house. It’s also possible, given the strange, single-branch nature of the Usher lineage, to read this phrase as suggesting an incestuous

relationship between the siblings. However, one reads their closeness, her illness devastates Roderick.

A reader's interpretation of Madeline as a character radically changes how one sees Madeline's escape from the tomb. From the narrator's perspective, she is a tragically ill woman, and he sees her impending death as a rational explanation for Roderick's melancholy. Supporting the narrator's lack of superstition, the very symptoms of Madeline's illness make her appear dead. Just as a rationalist reading suggests that Roderick's hypochondria creates his own illness, his fears of his sister's dying cause him to prematurely believe she has passed. Some scholarship locates Madeline in Gothic archetypes. For example, one popular reading suggests Madeline may be a vampire feeding off Roderick, accounting for the elements of his malady that are similar to anemia such as pallor and exhaustion. Another Gothic reading of Madeline views her as Roderick's doppelganger or Gothic double. This reading posits that Roderick and Madeline represent a single soul split into mind and body, with Madeline as representative of the body and Roderick as the mind. Thus, Roderick and Madeline share an unbreakable bond, and the death of one hastens the death of the other.

3.7.3 THE NARRATOR

The Narrator offers an interesting lens through which to view the story because he is a determined skeptic. From the minute he approaches the house, he notices that the atmosphere surrounding it is singularly frightening, but he dismisses all hints of the supernatural as fanciful or a dream. He later explains to Roderick that the strange glow around the house can be explained scientifically through electrical phenomena. It may be that he feels retrospective embarrassment that the house made him superstitious, as he is quick to call his initial dark feelings "childish." However, it is also possible to read the vehemence of his skepticism as him denying the clear evidence of the supernatural in order to protect his sanity in ways Roderick can't. Throughout the story, the narrator describes Roderick's gloom and melancholy, which Roderick blames in part on the house, as being powerful and self-propagating. The narrator, in contrast, has a powerful skepticism that won't let his mind wander for too long in terror. In a sense, the house

cannot make him sick because he does not allow his mind to take the frightening possibilities seriously.

Having the tale narrated by such a skeptic makes the events of the story more ambiguous because it is difficult to locate an objective viewpoint. The narrator appears fairly certain up to the end that nothing supernatural has occurred, only wavering to suggest he can't account for the dread he feels at seeing Madeline. However, given the gloomy and frightening house, its strange occupants, and our awareness that we are reading a work of fiction, we as readers may be less certain, and more inclined to search for vampires or other demons in the text, as literary scholars throughout history have. How much we trust the narrator's judgment, therefore, can completely change our interpretation of the story.

3.8 MAIN IDEAS

3.8.1 DOOM CAN BE A SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY

From the start of the story, Roderick sees little hope for his condition and seems to hasten his own doom. Although he nominally invites the narrator to help alleviate his nerves, the narrator finds him "a bounden slave" to his anxiety, unable or unwilling to do anything to improve his situation. Roderick mumbles consistently about his conviction that he will die of fright, and yet both surrounds himself with and creates his own macabre art, music, and literature. He believes that the very house he lives in causes his malady, and yet has not left it in years. He states that losing Madeline will leave him as the last of the Usher line, and yet he has not attempted to find a wife to build his own family with. Roderick is in fact so convinced that his sister does not have long to live that he inters her prematurely. Even doing all he can to cheer up Roderick, the narrator is forced to conclude that Roderick is so convinced of his own impending demise that nothing will help him. Furthermore, by interring Madeline alive, Roderick sets up a chain of events that will inevitably cause a fright, thereby fulfilling his own prophecy of how he will die. Roderick thus can be read as the architect of his own demise.

3.8.2 A PERSON'S MIND CREATES THEIR OWN FEAR

Although both the narrator and Roderick speak of the Usher manor as having an evil, sickening atmosphere, only Roderick truly takes that pronouncement to heart. The narrator observes the apparent gloom of the house but dismisses the idea that it could possibly be a real phenomenon, considering it a childish dream. Roderick, however, appears trapped in the house's atmosphere. While the two boyhood friends breathe the same air, read the same grim and fanciful books, and listen to the same melancholy songs of Roderick's devising, the narrator, while disturbed, does not truly grow ill, but Roderick continues to deteriorate. Thus, the story explores the subjectivity of madness. That is, situations in and of themselves are not the sole determinant of madness, but it's rather about how each individual reacts to that situation. With so many of the events in the story itself left up to interpretation, whether or not a reader decides to see supernatural elements in the story also plays out along these lines. The ambiguity of what actually happens in the story means that "The Fall of the House of Usher" functions as a kind of literary Rorschach test, revealing whether the reader is inclined to imagine a macabre Gothic tale or a strange family tragedy.

3.8.3 OLD ORDERS WILL FALL

The story chronicles the last days of what is described as an aristocratic family whose life and home are embedded in the lives of the peasantry who surround them. Nevertheless, everything about the House of Usher, both the family and the physical house, is mired in decay. Though the narrator insists that the foundations of the house look old but stable, aside from a shallow crack, the individual stones are crumbling, and the building is covered with fungi. Similarly, although the Usher family is ancient and respected, the only remaining Usher children are ill. The family tree has grown so narrowly that only one branch of it exists, meaning that all hope of continuing the line begins and ends with them. Everything about the House of Usher, from stone to family tradition is "ancient," and its inability to change has left it stagnant and rotting. Roderick refuses to even leave the house, much less humor the narrator's attempts to alleviate his illness, which he describes as a "family evil." At the end, Madeline and Roderick cause each other's death, and the house crumbles with the death of its occupants. In

this sense, the Usher way of being, their traditions, their maladies, have run their course. The House of Usher was always, in the end, going to fall.

3.9 THEMES

3.9.1 INTERNAL NATURE OF MADNESS

Like many of Poe's stories, "The Fall of the House of Usher" deals with the psychology of an unwell mind. In this case, instead of writing from the perspective of a madman, Poe uses a skeptical narrator to explore the internal nature of madness. Although the narrator tries his best to lift the spirits of Roderick, Roderick's own mind is unable to allow any hope to pierce it. The narrator describes Roderick's negative and depressed mood as being so powerful that it almost projects its own negativity onto other things, much as a lamp begets more light ("a mind from which darkness, as if an inherent positive quality, poured forth upon all objects"). This assessment implies that the strength of Roderick's belief in his illness and the doomed nature of his world is as good as these things being true in his mind. When Roderick sings "The Haunted Palace," he metaphorically compares his mind to a fortress overtaken by demons, sealed from the outside world. In other words, his mind is locked up with its madness, impenetrable to reason. Roderick's isolation is thus as much mental as it is physical, and nothing the narrator can do or say can truly rescue his friend.

Poe writes that Usher "entered, at some length, into what he conceived to be the nature of his malady." What exactly is his "malady" we never learn. Even Usher seems uncertain, contradictory in his description: "It was, he said, a constitutional and a family evil, and one for which he despaired to find a remedy--a mere nervous affection, he immediately added, which would undoubtedly soon pass off." The Narrator notes an "incoherence" and "inconsistency" in his old friend, but he offers little by way of scientific explanation of the condition. As a result, the line between sanity and insanity becomes blurred, which paves the way for the Narrator's own descent into madness.

3.9.2 THE REAL VS. THE SUPERNATURAL

Underlying the story is an unbroken tension between science and superstition, reason and madness, as represented by the narrator and Roderick. From the moment

the narrator encounters the gloomy atmosphere of the House of Usher, he is able to rationalize his fears. He acknowledges that the house itself appears to have an atmosphere of gloom, but also locates that purely in his imagination. Although Roderick's mood unnerves the narrator, he does not truly get lost in superstition. When the sky fills with an eerie glow during the storm, he once again turns to a scientific explanation. Roderick, on the other hand, languishes in his anxiety and despair. He reads books on witches and demons, prophesies his own doom, and even believes his house to be the cause of his illness. Although for the duration of the story, both friends live under the same roof, partaking in the same pastimes, their subjective perspectives remain distinct. Roderick may be a hypochondriac, as the narrator claims, or the narrator's rationalizations may be an attempt to protect his own mind from the horrors surrounding him.

The story itself allows the reader to decide whether its events describe supernatural occurrences or a tragedy with rational explanations. Although the narrator insists his feeling that an evil lurks within the house is likely a product of his imagination, the vehemence with which he insists on a rational explanation could suggest that he protests too much. Madeline returning from the tomb could signify that she is some supernatural or undead creature, but given that the symptoms of her illness include unconscious trances, Roderick in his agitation could have interred her prematurely. The house's destruction at the same time as its occupants seems to hint at some spiritual connection between the two. Nevertheless, the crack has existed since the beginning of the story, and the fall occurs in the midst of a giant storm. The story's unwillingness to fully resolve the tension between the real and the supernatural allows the reader to examine their own mind and see which way they lean.

3.9.3 THE INEVITABILITY OF DECAY

Although he goes to visit Roderick in an attempt to help him, it's fairly clear the moment the narrator arrives at the Usher manor that nothing can halt the decay that has gripped both the house and its residents. Indeed, the story's very title alerts the reader that the House of Usher is destined to fall. Therefore, although the narrator insists that the house's foundations look sound, the sprouting mushrooms, the crumbling stones,

and the shallow crack feel ominous and foreboding. Upon seeing Roderick, he observes that his friend's physical and mental states have both appeared to decay, resulting in him being nearly unrecognizable to the narrator. The Usher line also appears to also be on shaky ground, not just because of Roderick and Madeline's illnesses, but because a family tree with only one branch can be wiped out in a single generation. Although it's up to interpretation whether the house truly has a gloomy atmosphere of its own, thematically, the House of Usher and its occupants appear to exist in a state permanently on the brink of death. The narrator's cheer and rationality have no power against the doom that lives so near to the Ushers. It's possible to read the promised fall of the house as a general comment on the inevitability of death, or simply as Poe's creating a thrilling atmosphere of dread to entertain his readers.

Additionally, some scholars have interpreted the deterioration in the story as Poe, an American writer, commenting on European literary forms and ways of being. In the nineteenth century, the United States was still a very new country establishing its own identity and culture. However, "The Fall of the House of Usher" draws heavily from the English Gothic tradition, with its ominous, isolated manor whose strange residents appear to hide a family secret. The story also focuses on the aristocracy, a very European social structure where status is predicated on birth. In American self-mythology, one's wealth, not one's birth, determines their social position. Finally, the narrator of the story emphasizes multiple times that the Usher line and its house are ancient and have stood for centuries unchanged. According to this reading of the story, Poe presents the inevitable sickness and madness inherent in these old systems and tropes. If the story is predictable, it is only because such Gothic tales have only one end: destruction.

3.9.4 MORTALITY

The plot of Poe's tale essentially involves a woman who dies, is buried, and rises from the grave. But did she ever die? Near the horrific finale of the tale, Usher screams: "We have put her living in the tomb!" Premature burial was something of an obsession for Poe, who featured it in many of his stories. In "The Fall of the House of Usher," however, it is not clear to what extent the supernatural can be said to account for the

strangeness of the events in the tale. Madeline may actually have died and risen like a vampire--much as Usher seems to possess vampiric qualities, arising "from a sofa on which he had been lying at full length" when the Narrator first sees him, avoiding all daylight and most food, and roaming through his crypt-like abode. But a more realistic version of events suggests that she may have been mistaken for dead--and luckily managed to escape her tomb. Either way, the line between life and death is a fine one in Poe's fiction, and Usher's study of the "sentience of all vegetable things" fits aptly with Poe's own preoccupations.

3.9.5 FEAR

If we were to try to define Roderick Usher's illness precisely, we might diagnose him with acute anxiety. What seems to terrify Usher is fear itself. "To an anomalous species of terror," Poe writes, "I found him a bounden slave." Usher tries to explain to the Narrator that he dreads "the events of the future, not in themselves but in their results." He dreads the intangible and the unknowable; he fears precisely what cannot be rationally feared. Fear for no apparent reason except ambiguity itself is an important motif in Poe's tale, which after all begins with the Narrator's description of his own irrational dread: "I know not how it was--but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit." Later, Usher identifies fear itself as the thing that will kill him, suggesting that his own anxiety is what conjures up the blood-stained Madeline--or that she is simply a manifestation of his own deepest neuroses.

3.9.6 INCEST

What binds Usher to Madeline, and what renders him terrified of her? If he conjures up her specter, arisen from the grave to bring him to his own, why does he do so? There is a clear incestuous undertone to the relationship between the brother and sister. Without spouses they live together in the great family home, each of them wasting away within the building's dark rooms. The Narrator describes the strange qualities of the Usher family--that it never has put forth "any enduring branch," that "the entire family lay in the direct line of descent." The implication is that incest is the norm for the Ushers, and that Roderick's and Madeline's strange illnesses may stem from their inbred genes.

3.9.7 FRIENDSHIP

The Narrator arrives at the House of Usher in order to visit a friend. While the relationship between him and Roderick is never fully explained, the reader does learn that they were boyhood friends. That Usher writes to the Narrator, urging him to give him company in his time of distress, suggests the close rapport between the two men. But Poe's story is a chronicle of both distancing and identification. In other words, the Narrator seems to remove himself spiritually from Usher, terrified of his house, his illness, his appearance, but as the narrative progresses he cannot help but be drawn into Usher's twisted world. Alas, family (if not incest) trumps friendship at the end, when Usher and Madeline are reunited and the Narrator is cast off on his own into the raging storm.

3.9.8 BURIAL

There are three images of would-be "tombs" or "crypts" in "The Fall of the House of Usher." The house itself is shut off from the daylight, its cavernous rooms turned into spacious vaults, in which characters who never seem entirely alive--Madeline and Usher--waste away. Second, Usher's painting is of "an immensely long and rectangular vault or tunnel," foreshadowing the third image of a tomb, the real one of Madeline's temporary burial. What Poe has constructed therefore is a kind of *mise-en-abime* (story-within-a-story)--tombs being represented within tombs. The implication, especially once the entire House of Usher sinks into a new grave below the tarn, is that the world itself is a kind of crypt.

3.9.9 THE ARTS

Despite (or because) of his madness, Usher is skilled at music and apparently is quite a painter. The Narrator compares Roderick's "phantasmagoric conceptions" to those of a real artist, Fuseli, and the Narrator seems both entranced and terrified by them. "If ever mortal painted an idea," he proposes, "that mortal was Roderick Usher." Insofar as art might be deemed a stab at immortality, the death-obsessed Usher, so certain of his own demise, strives to cling to time itself by producing works which can last beyond him. And insofar as art is a fleeting good in itself, Usher might at least claim a bit of beauty in the midst of his anxieties. Ironically, though, the one painting of his that

the Narrator describes portrays a tomb, and everything is finally destroyed by the House's collapse. It would seem that his art fails Roderick Usher.

3.10 MOTIFS

3.10.1 ART

Roderick surrounds himself with various forms of art, including visual art, musical instruments, and many different books. His days are almost entirely spent creating art of his own, particularly paintings and songs. Notably, all the art Roderick gravitates toward or indeed can tolerate tends toward the macabre and occult. Amongst the books the narrator finds in Roderick's collection are stories of demons, an inquisitor's list of magical texts confiscated from sorcerers, and a book describing visions of heaven and hell. Roderick's paintings and songs are similarly unsettling, described by the narrator as "phantasmagoric," "fantastic," and "wild." However, it's unclear whether Roderick's mental state has attracted him to these dark works, or whether surrounding himself with disturbing images and ideas has merely perpetrated Roderick's mental illness. The narrator worries that the art may be contributing to Roderick's anxiety and depression, but Roderick's own art appears to be his way of expressing the horror of his inner life.

3.10.2 GOTHIC ELEMENTS

The story is full of elements of classic Gothic literature, working in tandem to create a frightening atmosphere. The manor house itself, isolated and full of decay, is a staple of Gothic literature. As twins, Roderick and Madeline can be read as doppelgangers or Gothic doubles, representing a split soul. Furthermore, some scholars have read the "strange sympathy" between the twins and the narrowness of the Usher family tree to have incestuous undertones, recalling Gothic literature's exploration of sexual perversion. Poe further makes use of a literary device called the objective correlative—the use of inanimate objects such as the weather or other setting details to highlight his characters' mental states—to enhance the Gothic nature of his tale. Thus, the dead trees and gray atmosphere surrounding the house represent Roderick's gloom, and the terrifying storm at the end of the story matches the eerie energy of the narrative climax. The result is an incredibly unsettling story.

3.10.3 DOUBLES AND DIVISIONS

"The Fall of the House of Usher" makes extensive use of doubling to explore its themes. The most obvious pairing is that of Roderick and Madeline, who as twins with a strange connection, cannot bear to be separated. Roderick suffers from a mental condition and Madeline from a physical condition, leading many scholars to interpret them as a single soul divided between mind and body. However, Roderick and the narrator also represent the binary between madness and reason. Roderick's anxiety compounds with each passing day, as the narrator consistently seeks rational explanations for his fear. Over the course of these stories, the binaries are forcibly pulled apart. The narrator quickly realizes that nothing he does can ameliorate Roderick's terror. Roderick inters Madeline in the vault, separating them for what he believes is eternity. Finally, both Roderick and Madeline are separated by death, and the House of Usher—both the family and the house—are torn asunder.

3.11 SYMBOLS

3.11.1 "THE HAUNTED PALACE"

The song Roderick sings, "The Haunted Palace," is an extended metaphor that compares the mind of a mad person to a haunted house or a palace under siege. This metaphor is representative of Roderick's own mental deterioration. In the first stanza of the song, Roderick names the monarch Thought ("In the monarch Thought's dominion"), suggesting that reason rules over this mind. The physical elements of the palace additionally map onto the features of a human face. The "banners yellow, glorious, golden" that "float and flow" on the roof are locks of blond hair. It has two "luminous" windows representing eyes, and the door made of pearls and rubies is a mouth with red lips and pearly white teeth. However, sorrow attacks the palace, leaving the once luminous eyes red from crying, the ruby red lips now pale. The last three lines of the song ("Through the pale door, | A hideous throng rush out forever, | And laugh — but smile no more") describe the horrible wailing of the person now that their reason has been overthrown. Although the person described in the song isn't literally Roderick, the description of physical and emotional deterioration evokes his own, showing self-awareness of his pitiful state.

3.11.2 THE HOUSE OF USHER

The story explicitly ties the physical House of Usher to the Usher lineage, stating that the peasants in that domain use the phrase “House of Usher” for both. However, the connection between the house and the family runs deeper than linguistic shorthand. The decrepit house acts as a physical manifestation of the Usher family. The narrator observes the house as having an almost human-like quality, describing its windows as “eye-like.” Just as Roderick appears to radiate his own melancholy, so too does the house have a depressing air. Furthermore, the house, despite holding together as a totality, shows signs of physical decay, like crumbling stones, dead trees, and mushrooms growing from the masonry. Madeline herself is dying of a wasting disease, showing physical deterioration. Perhaps the most obvious parallel lies in the initially shallow crack in the manor, representing the impending destruction of the house. With the dissolution of the family line, so too falls the house. Because the last of the Usher line are twins, that the crack divides the house in two signals their eternal separation in death.

3.12 LET US SUM UP

An unnamed protagonist (the Narrator) is summoned to the remote mansion of his boyhood friend, Roderick Usher. Filled with a sense of dread by the sight of the house itself, the Narrator reunites with his old companion, who is suffering from a strange mental illness and whose sister Madeline is near death due to a mysterious disease. The Narrator provides company to Usher while he paints and plays guitar, spending all his days inside, avoiding the sunlight and obsessing over the sentience of the non-living. When Madeline dies, Usher decides to bury her temporarily in one of his house's large vaults. A few days later, however, she emerges from her provisional tomb, killing her brother while the Narrator flees for his life. The House of Usher splits apart and collapses, wiping away the last remnants of the ancient family.

LESSON 4: JOHN STEINBECK- THE CHRYSANTHEMUMS

4.1 AUTHOUR INTRODUCTION

John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California in 1902, and spent most of his life in Monterey County, the setting of many of his fictional works. He attended Stanford University intermittently between 1920 and 1926. Steinbeck did not graduate from Stanford, and instead decided to support himself through manual labor while continuing to write. His experiences among the working class in California lent authenticity to his stories about the lives of the workers themselves, who are the central characters of his most important novels.

Steinbeck's first novel, *The Golden Cup*, was published in 1929, and was followed by *The Meadows of Heaven* and, in 1933, *To an Unknown God*. However, his first three novels failed critically and commercially. Steinbeck had his first success with *Tortilla Flat* (1935), a touching and humorous story about Mexican Americans. However, his next novel, *In Struggle Uncertain* (1936) is known for its markedly somber tone. This novel is a classic account of a farmworkers' strike and the pair of Marxist leaders who lead it, and it is also the first Steinbeck novel to contain the striking social commentary that characterizes his most notable works. Steinbeck received even more acclaim for his novel *Of Mice and Men* (1937), a tragic story about the strange and complex bond between two migrant workers. His greatest achievement, *The Grapes of Wrath*, earned Steinbeck a Pulitzer Prize and a National Book Award.

During World War II, Steinbeck wrote some very effective propaganda works for the government, including *The Moon Has Set* (1942), a novel about Norwegians under Nazi rule. Steinbeck also worked as a war correspondent. With the end of World War II and the transition from the Great Depression to economic prosperity, Steinbeck's work softened somewhat. Although his work continued to contain elements of social criticism characteristic of his earlier works, the three novels that Steinbeck published immediately after the war, *The Cannery Slums* (1945), *The Pearl*, and *The Lost Bus* (both written in 1947) were more sentimental and relaxed. Steinbeck also contributed some scripts. He wrote the original stories for several films, including *Cast Away* (1944), directed by

Alfred Hitchcock, and *A Medal for Benny*, and wrote the screenplay for the film *Viva Zapata!* by Elia Kazan, a biographical film about Emiliano Zapata, the Mexican peasant who was the leader of the revolution in the state of Morelos. Steinbeck married Carol Henning in 1930 and lived with her in Pacific Grove, California. He spent much of his time in Monterey with his friend, Ricketts, in his Cannery Row laboratory, an experience that inspired his 1945 novel, *Cannery Slums*. In 1943, Steinbeck married his second wife, Gwyndolyn Conger, with whom he had two children. The year 1948 was a particularly difficult year for Steinbeck: Ricketts died, and Gwyndolyn abandoned him. However, Steinbeck found happiness in his 1950 marriage to Elaine Scott, with whom he lived in New York City. Two years later, he published the highly controversial *East of Eden*, the novel he called “the standout,” set in the Salinas Valley, California.

Steinbeck's later works were relatively shorter, but he made several notable attempts to reaffirm his stature as one of the greatest novelists with works such as: *Burning Bright* (1950), *East of Eden* (1952), and *The Winter of My Discontent*. (1961). However, none of these works equaled the critical reputation of his previous novels. Steinbeck's reputation is mainly due to the realistic and proletariat-focused novels he wrote during *The Great Depression*. It is in these works in which Steinbeck manages to create complex and symbolic structures and transmit the archetypal qualities of his characters. Steinbeck received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962, and died in New York in 1968.

4.2 WORK INTRODUCTION

First appearing in print in *Harper's Magazine* in October 1937, "The Chrysanthemums" is considered by many to be the best story John Steinbeck ever wrote, and among the top short stories of the twentieth century. In 1938, "The Chrysanthemums" was published in Steinbeck's short story collection *The Long Valley,* and has remained a favorite of critics and readers alike in the years since.

Unusually for Steinbeck, "The Chrysanthemums" is often hearded as presenting a feminist portrayal of its main character, housewife Elisa Allen. Regarding this theme, critic C Kenneth Pellow writes "Not only is such feminism an unusual theme for John Steinbeck, but it is not often found in any of America's best-known male novelists"

(Pellow 1989). The story is equally lauded for its subtlety and nuance in its depiction of Elisa's seemingly innocuous encounter with a traveling tinker, which nonetheless appears to have a profound impact on her emotionally. About the work, Steinbeck himself wrote: "It is entirely different and is designed to strike without the reader's knowledge. I mean he reads it casually and after it is finished feels that something profound has happened to him although he does not know what nor how."

Over seventy years after its original publication, critics and readers alike continue to dissect the layers of meaning in "The Chrysanthemums," and whether Steinbeck ultimately offers a bleak or optimistic future for his oppressed female protagonist.

4.3 SUMMARY

It is winter in Salinas Valley, California. The sun is not shining, and fog covers the valley. On Henry Allen’s foothill ranch, the hay cutting and storing has been finished, and the orchards are waiting for rain. Elisa Allen, Henry’s wife, is working in her flower garden and sees her husband speaking with two cigarette-smoking strangers. Elisa is thirty-five years old, attractive and clear-eyed, although at the moment she is clad in a masculine gardening outfit with men’s shoes and a man’s hat. Her apron covers her dress, and gloves cover her hands. As she works away at her chrysanthemums, she steals occasional glances at the strange men. Her house, which stands nearby, is very clean.

The strangers get into their Ford coupe and leave. Elisa looks down at the stems of her flowers, which she has kept entirely free of pests. Henry appears and praises her work. Elisa seems pleased and proud. Henry says he wishes she would turn her talents to the orchard. She responds eagerly to this suggestion, but it seems he was only joking. When she asks, he tells her that the men were from the Western Meat Company and bought thirty of his steers for a good price. He suggests they go to the town of Salinas for dinner and a movie to celebrate. He teases her, asking whether she’d like to see the fights, and she says she wouldn’t.

Henry leaves, and Elisa turns her attention back to her chrysanthemums. A wagon with a canvas top driven by a large bearded man appears on the road in the distance. A misspelled sign advertises the man’s services as a tinker who repairs pots

and pans. The wagon turns into Elisa's yard. Her dogs and the man's dog sniff each other, and the tinker makes a joke about the ferocity of his animal. When he gets out of the wagon, Elisa sees that he is big and not very old. He wears a ragged, dirty suit, and his hands are rough. They continue to make small talk, and Elisa is charmed when the tinker says he simply follows good weather. He asks whether she has any work for him, and when she repeatedly says no, he whines, saying he hasn't had any business and is hungry. Then he asks about Elisa's chrysanthemums, and her annoyance vanishes. They discuss the flowers, and the tinker says that he has a customer who wants to raise chrysanthemums. Excited, Elisa says he can take her some shoots in a pot filled with damp sand. She takes off her hat and gloves and fills a red pot with soil and the shoots.

Elisa gives the tinker instructions to pass along to the woman. She explains that the most care is needed when the budding begins. She claims to have planting hands and can feel the flowers as if she's one with them. She speaks from a kneeling position, growing impassioned. The tinker says he might know what she means, and Elisa interrupts him to talk about the stars, which at night are "driven into your body" and are "hot and sharp and—lovely." She reaches out to touch his pant leg, but stops before she does. He says such things are not as nice if you haven't eaten. Sobered, Elisa finds two pans for him to fix.

As the tinker works, she asks him if he sleeps in the wagon. She says she wishes women could live the kind of life he does. He says it wouldn't be suitable, and she asks how he knows. After paying him fifty cents, she says that she can do the same work he does. He says his life would be lonesome and frightening for a woman. Before he leaves, she reminds him to keep the sand around the chrysanthemums damp. For a moment, he seems to forget that she gave him the flowers. Elisa watches the wagon trundle away, whispering to herself.

She goes into the house and bathes, scrubbing her skin with pumice until it hurts. Then she examines her naked body in the mirror, pulling in her stomach and pushing out her chest, then observing her back. She dresses in new underwear and a dress and does her hair and makeup. Henry comes home and takes a bath. Elisa sets out his clothes and then goes to sit on the porch. When Henry emerges, he says that she looks

nice, sounding surprised. She asks him what he means, and he says she looks “different, strong and happy.” She asks what he means by strong. Confused, he says that she’s playing a game and then explains that she looks like she could break a calf and eat it. Elisa loses her composure for a moment and then agrees with him.

As they drive along the road toward Salinas, Elisa sees a dark spot up ahead and can’t stop herself from looking at it, sure that it’s a pile of discarded chrysanthemum shoots that the tinker has thrown away. Elisa thinks that he could have at least disposed of them off the road, and then realizes he had to keep the pot. They pass the tinker’s wagon, and Elisa doesn’t look. She says she is looking forward to dinner. Henry says she is different again, but then says kindly that he should take her out more often. She asks whether they can have wine at dinner, and he says yes. Elisa says she has read that at the fights the men beat each other until their boxing gloves are soaked with blood. She asks whether women go to the fights, and Henry says that some do and that he’ll take her to one if she’d like to go. She declines and pulls her coat collar over her face so that Henry can’t see her crying.

4.4 ANALYSIS

4.4.1 BEGINNING

The first paragraph of the story introduces the setting: the Salinas Valley in December, during “a time of quiet and waiting" (337). Steinback has often been praised for his deliberate and meticulous settings, most of which mirror the story or protagonist in some way. In this case, Steinbeck provides a glimpse of a quiet, foggy, "cold and tender" valley, where farmers are "mildly hopeful" for rain. This characterization mirrors, in many ways, Elisa Allen, the story's protagonist, who is in an equally ambivalent, cold yet hopeful, seemingly quiet place at the beginning of 'The Chrysanthemums.'

Elisa is introduced wearing bulky clothing and a man's hat, but Steinbeck quickly hints at a handsome woman within, with "eyes as clear as water" (338). She is quickly established as an expert, if over-eager, gardener, who keeps a tidy house. Both of these skills are traditionally feminine ones; within just a page of the story's beginning, Steinbeck places his protagonist at the intersection of both "male" and "female" qualities: dressed like a man and with "over-powerful" energy (which contrasts with

a more traditionally feminine characterization of weakness or demureness), Elisa nonetheless is attractive, repulsed by the traditionally masculine activity of boxing, and skilled at two conventionally feminine activities: gardening and housekeeping.

In his description of her gardening as "over-powerful" and "over-eager", Steinbeck suggests that Elisa has already mastered the few activities open to her as a woman, and her excess of energy implies that she perhaps yearns for more fulfilling challenges. Instead, she must watch her husband negotiate a business deal from a distance, with no way to participate or even know what is being discussed until her husband comes to her and chooses to share the news at his own discretion.

Although Henry and Elisa are respectful and even kind to each other in this first exchange, Henry's casual suggestion that Elisa help in the orchard followed by his immediate dismissal of the idea after she shows enthusiasm, as well as the way he teases her with his idea that they go to a fight that night insinuates that their relationship is not that of equals. Their brief conversation evokes many conventional gender roles and structures: Henry, as the man, is the one who proposes the activity; he jokes with her, playing on traditionally feminine fears at her expense; except for a brief moment where she expresses excitement at the prospect of working in the field, she otherwise spends the conversation acquiescing or complimenting her husband in a more submissive position of "supporter."

The chrysanthemums themselves are a powerful symbol at the heart of the story: like Elisa, disguised in her boxy masculine gardening outfit, they are not currently flowering, but are capable of blooming to great, impressive beauty. Like Elisa, though, they are more decorative than truly useful, which is symbolic both of Elisa's subservient position as a woman and the lack of agency that is dictated by her gender.

4.4.2 THE TINKER'S VISIT

The seemingly innocuous visit of a traveling tinker has a profound impact on Elisa Allen. Although when he initially arrives she makes casual small talk with him, joking and bantering, she is still reluctant to engage with him professionally, insisting that she doesn't need anything fixed. This attitude seems rigidly unbreakable until the tinker compliments her chrysanthemums, which instantly melts Elisa's resistance. Her

enthusiasm for the flowers causes her to engage warmly with the man, and, despite herself, he seems to awaken a sort of physical and sexual need in her.

Throughout their conversation, Elisa begins stripping away her bulky, masculine gardening outfit - removing the gloves and fixing her hair. She is both charmed and disarmed by the tinker's interest in her flowers -- as though this small bit of warmth and attention from an unknown man is enough to unleash a carnal side. This suggests that her relationship with Henry, her husband, which the reader has already seen is respectful and polite, if not warm, is not satisfying Elisa on a physical level. By the time she begins to describe her intuitive way with the chrysanthemums, she is kneeling on the ground, "her breast swelled passionately" (344). She can barely restrain herself from touching the tinker's leg; her carnal need is almost physicalized.

The tinker, for his part, seems eager to charm her but less interested in any physical advances than he is in the possibility of a quick sale. His feigned interest in the chrysanthemums is merely an attempt to melt Elisa's defenses so that she will offer him a job. Indeed, his utter confusion when she provides the last piece of advice about the flowers as he's driving away indicates that the story about the woman down the road without any chrysanthemums in her garden was no more than a ruse to gain Elisa's trust.

Through her banter, Elisa proves herself to be the equal to the tinker, if not his better, both intellectually and socially. The misspelled words on his wagon as well as the laughter that disappears from his face and eyes "the moment his laughing voice ceased" (341) suggests that the tinker is neither especially charming, warm, nor intelligent. Thus, Elisa's extreme enthusiasm as well as her almost instant attraction to him after he asks about her chrysanthemums says more about her than it does about him - suggesting that her own life is so unsatisfying and deficient that merely the smallest whiff of something new and different is enough to totally arouse her sensibilities.

Likewise, Elisa's excitement towards the tinker's itinerant life demonstrates a similar dissatisfaction with her own circumstances. The tinker insists that his life is not "the right kind of life for a woman" (344), but, when pressed, he doesn't immediately

offer any reasons why. Only later, after Elisa boasts that she could do his job just as competently as him, does he finally argue that it would be lonely and scary for her to live and travel on the wagon, as he does. Although the tinker is a totally different man than Henry Allen, Elisa's husband, from a totally different part of society and with a totally different lifestyle, he is just as ensconced in the same patriarchal establishment as Henry and Elisa, insisting that anything involving a degree of agency or independence would be inappropriate, scary, and lonely for a woman.

Elisa spends most of the story behind her garden fence; it is only when she gets the pots from inside her house for the tinker to repair that she leaves the enclosure. As she watches him ride away, it is from in front of the fence, not behind it, a subtle difference in location that nonetheless represents a massive shift in Elisa's psychology and character. If she was able to lose herself within her fixed "role" as wife and woman in society before, hiding behind her garden fence, something about the tinker's visit has caused a shift within her, and she is now outside of the fence. Indeed, she does not go back into the garden for the rest of the story, nor does she appear to be the same submissive, quiet woman that she was at the story's beginning.

4.4.3 THE END

After the tinker leaves, Elisa retreats to the house, bathes, and studies her body, as though his visit has somehow awoken in her an awareness of it and interest in it. Her methodical, ritualized dressing into her prettiest outfit, as well as the effort she puts into her hair and makeup, represent a total transformation from the "blocked and heavy" (338) figure she presents at the story's start, dirty and wearing her masculine gardening outfit.

The sexual awakening the tinker appears to have sparked in her is emphasized by this transformation, although whether this is a repressive view of the future (by showing Elisa moving away from the potential of "masculine" agency and back into a more conventional, oppressed "female" position) or a more empowered vision of herself (interested in exploring her own sexual potential, and, as she herself describes on page 347, "strong") has remained a topic of debate by critics and readers alike.

Elisa's relationship to Henry is different after the tinker's visit. He himself can't seem to figure out what's different about her, although he recognizes something is, and remarks repeatedly about it. What she describes as strength, though, he ultimately rejects as her doing nothing more than "playing a game" (347), as though it is easier for him to recognize childish playfulness in Elisa than it is to recognize any kind of actual growing strength in his wife.

Elisa's recognition of the discarded chrysanthemum sprouts, and her realization that the tinker used her for a sale seem to further disrupt her uneasy mind, and challenge some of the personal strength she's recently found. Henry's obliviousness to her discovery only emphasizes his inability to access his wife's inner self. Elisa is clearly a creative person, and assumed that by giving her flowers to the tinker, she had found an outlet for some of her creative energy, but the discovery of the discarded sprouts reverses and destroys this satisfaction.

Elisa's request for wine, and her questions about the fighting both demonstrate her eagerness to continue to press herself. For some, these requests are no more than Elisa's own, rather pathetic attempts to satisfy a deeper yearning with a superficial activity that will never accomplish the goal. Other critics see the request for wine as a legitimate moment of growth in her character; a demonstration that she has bloomed, much like her chrysanthemums, into a different, stronger version of herself.

Likewise, the story's final sentence has been the source of some debate. For many, the crying represents her own tacit understanding of her defeat, the sense that she will never rise above the oppressive circumstances brought on by her gender. Others, though, contend that just like her chrysanthemums, which aren't currently in bloom but will bloom by the next season, Elisa will one day re-emerge as a new, more empowered version of herself. Although to most readers, "crying weakly-like an old woman" (348) represents a kind of mournful failure, others have argued that there can be something beautiful and cathartic in this image, which should be appreciated as such.

4.5 CHARACTER LIST

4.5.1 ELISA ALLEN

An energetic, attractive thirty-five year old woman, Elisa Allen is the story's protagonist. Although she is an excellent gardener and housekeeper, Elisa nonetheless feels a profound dissastisfaction with her own life. She responds eagerly to her husband's joke that she could help him in the orchard, and expresses equal excitement considering the tinker's independent, nomadic life. The enthusiasm with which she responds both verbally and, eventually, physically, to the tinker speaks to her unhappiness with her marriage, specifically with the dissatisfaction she has with her husband on a physical level.

Elisa's easy banter with the tinker, her eloquence in describing the intuitive connection she has with her chrysanthemums, and her robust energy indicates that she is in the prime of her life physically and intellectually. Her lack of access to tasks beyond those small domestic chores required of her as a woman and a wife mean she is stifled in her position in life, and her lack of agency keeps her submissive to her husband.

4.5.2 HENRY ALLEN

Elisa's husband, Henry, is by all accounts a proficient and compentant partner. He treats Elisa with relative respect, and performs those duties one would expect of an adequate husband - he praises Elisa's gardening skills, offers to take her out, and compliments her beauty.

Despite this proficiency, though, it is clear that Henry does not understand his wife's true frustration, nor is he capable of connecting with her on any level more profound than that provided by their stereotypical roles as husband and wife. When she presses him on any of his banal compliments, he gets confused and can't answer her, and he appears baffled by her "strange" questions about boxing matches. He is oblivious to Elisa's realization of the tinker's abandoned chrysanthemum sprouts. Elisa's insistence on pulling up her collar so that he can't see her cry at the story's end speaks to a fundamental distance in their relationship.

4.5.3 THE TINKER

An itinernant salesman, the tinker is poor and uneducated, but nonetheless possesses enough charm and persistance to eke out a living. He employs a variety of strategies to try and earn some business from Elisa, from bragging about his competence to angling for pity, and finally, flattering her by expressing an interest in her chrysanthemums.

When he realizes that Elisa has responded to this tack, the tinker is shrewd enough to to press this advantage, inveting a woman "down the road" who is missing chrysanthemums in her garden. Despite his uncouth appearance, then, he has an underlying cleverness that he exploits to his advantage.

Whether or not the tinker is aware of Elisa's sexual attraction to him, he does not respond to it, seeming to be much more interested in getting money out of Elisa. Like Henry, the tinker is fully immersed in the patriarchal society of which he is on the fringes, insisting that Elisa would be unhappy in his position.

4.6 THEMES

4.6.1 THE INEQUALITY OF GENDER

“The Chrysanthemums” is an understated but pointed critique of a society that has no place for intelligent women. Elisa is smart, energetic, attractive, and ambitious, but all these attributes go to waste. Although the two key men in the story are less interesting and talented than she, their lives are far more fulfilling and busier. Henry is not as intelligent as Elisa, but it is he who runs the ranch, supports himself and his wife, and makes business deals. All Elisa can do is watch him from afar as he performs his job. Whatever information she gets about the management of the ranch comes indirectly from Henry, who speaks only in vague, condescending terms instead of treating his wife as an equal partner. The tinker seems cleverer than Henry but doesn’t have Elisa’s spirit, passion, or thirst for adventure. According to Elisa, he may not even match her skill as a tinker. Nevertheless, it is he who gets to ride about the country, living an adventurous life that he believes is unfit for women. Steinbeck uses Henry and

the tinker as stand-ins for the paternalism of patriarchal societies in general: just as they ignore women's potential, so too does society.

4.6.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF SEXUAL FULFILLMENT

Steinbeck argues that the need for sexual fulfillment is incredibly powerful and that the pursuit of it can cause people to act in irrational ways. Elisa and Henry have a functional but passionless marriage and seem to treat each other more as siblings or friends than spouses. Elisa is a robust woman associated with fertility and sexuality but has no children, hinting at the nonsexual nature of her relationship with Henry. Despite the fact that her marriage doesn't meet her needs, Elisa remains a sexual person, a quality that Steinbeck portrays as normal and desirable. As a result of her frustrated desires, Elisa's attraction to the tinker is frighteningly powerful and uncontrollable. When she speaks to him about looking at the stars at night, for example, her language is forward, nearly pornographic. She kneels before him in a posture of sexual submission, reaching out toward him and looking, as the narrator puts it, "like a fawning dog." In essence, she puts herself at the mercy of a complete stranger. The aftermath of Elisa's powerful attraction is perhaps even more damaging than the attraction itself. Her sexuality, forced to lie dormant for so long, overwhelms her and crushes her spirit after springing to life so suddenly.

4.7 SYMBOL

4.7.1 THE CHRYSANTHEMUMS

The most major symbol of the story are the chrysanthemums, which represent Elisa. Like Elisa, the chrysanthemums are currently dormant and bare, not in bloom. Like Elisa, they are confined to a narrow environment (the garden), with no way to escape. They are beautiful, decorative flowers, but serve no useful function beyond this ornamental one - in the same way, as a woman, Elisa is unable to do more than a limited range of tasks, and certainly none that would allow her to be independent or provide for herself.

The tinker's casual abandonment of the chrysanthemums at the side of the road is symbolic of the way he, as a man, so easily dismisses Elisa as anything more than a

source of income. Although she attempts to engage with him on an intellectual, spiritual, and even physical level, he barely considers these offerings, instead pressing her for money. Once he's gotten that, he departs, forgetting about her just as he jettisons the chrysanthemum buds at the side of the road.

Many critics have also compared the chrysanthemums to Elisa in terms of her apparent childlessness: like the unblooming flowers, Elisa has no children.

Others have argued that the chrysanthemums' eventual blooming suggest that Elisa will ultimately "bloom" herself, by developing more of a sense of independence and agency.

4.7.2 THE DOGS

When the tinker arrives at her farm, his mongrel dog comes first, running ahead of the wagon. After observing this, Elisa's two dogs immediately run forward, threatening the dog, who eventually cowers back under the wagon, unharmed but nervous.

The interaction between Elisa's dogs and the tinker's dog is symbolic of the interaction between Elisa and the tinker themselves. Just as her dogs are stronger than the tinker's mongrel, so is Elisa wittier, smarter, and more of a robust person than the tinker. She demonstrates superior wit during their banter, and, as she later reveals, she is just as capable as him of doing any of his repair work. However, despite her superior wit and skill, Elisa still succumbs to the tinker's charm, paying him for a job she could have done herself, and he leaves, just like his dog, unharmed and intact -- and fifty cents richer.

As the tinker's wagon rolls away, Elisa's dogs have abandoned the threat of the mongrel, and are sleeping. In the same way, Elisa has passively allowed the tinker to extort her out of fifty cents, and leave with her money in his pocket and her flowers in his wagon.

4.7.3 POTS

In the story's first paragraph, the Salinas Valley is described as a "closed pot" because of the fog that sits on the mountains "like a lid" (337). Literal pots appear in the

story, as well - like the flowerpot Elisa gives to the tinker to hold her chrysanthemums in, and the two pots she finds for him to repair when he makes her feel guilty for not giving him work.

Elisa is trapped in the "closed pot" of her life - unlike Henry and the tinker, both of whom have a means of transportation that allows them to leave the farm, or even the Salinas Valley if they wanted, she lacks this independence, and is physically confined to the farm just as she is confined to the narrow options available to her as a woman.

If the pot represents one's life, the tinker's arrival and pronouncement that he can "fix pots" seems to suggest that he is figuratively offering himself as a means to repair Elisa's damaged life. However, as she herself realizes by the end of their encounter, he is not a true solution for her: she herself can do the same job (suggesting that she is perhaps her own salvation and means of finding satisfaction from her life.) Later, when the tinker dumps Elisa's chrysanthemums by the side of the road and keeps her flowerpot, it demonstrates how easily he used her, and indeed, how easily men can use women within this patriarchal society as a means to whatever end they are pusuing.

4.7.4 CLOTHING

Different types of clothing are used symbolically throughout the story. At the story's start, Elisa is dressed in a heavy gardening outfit that makes her look "blocked and heavy" (p. 338), symbolic of the oppression she faces due to her gender and position in life. Just as the masculine outfit is weighing her down, so too is the masculine patriarchy suppressing her freedom.

After her encounter with the tinker, though, Elisa goes into her house and removes her clothes entirely, a shedding that symbolically represents her growing sense of self and independence, as well as a desire to literally free herself from the masculine forces that suppress her. She then dresses carefully in her most feminine outfit, doing her makeup and hair carefully. The encounter with the tinker has awakened her sense of her own sexuality and power, and the feminine clothing she dons is symbolic of this awakening.

4.7.5 THE SALINAS VALLEY

The Salinas Valley symbolizes Elisa's emotional life. The story opens with a lengthy description of the valley, which Steinbeck likens to a pot topped with a lid made of fog. The metaphor of the valley as a "closed pot" suggests that Elisa is trapped inside an airless world and that her existence has reached a boiling point. We also learn that although there is sunshine nearby, no light penetrates the valley. Sunshine is often associated with happiness, and the implication is that while people near her are happy, Elisa is not. It is December, and the prevailing atmosphere in the valley is chilly and watchful but not yet devoid of hope. This description of the weather and the general spirits of the inhabitants of the valley applies equally well to Elisa, who is like a fallow field: quiet but not beaten down or unable to grow. What first seems to be a lyrical description of a valley in California is revealed to be a rich symbol of Elisa's claustrophobic, unhappy, yet hopeful inner life.

4.8 MOTIF

4.8.1 TECHNOLOGY

One motif that repeats throughout the story is that of technology, especially as compared to the natural world of the Salinas Valley. Early on in the story, the male characters are aligned with technology, whereas Elisa is aligned with nature, creating a parallel between the tension between men and women and the tension between nature and technology. In the story, technology is aligned with independence, agency and control, all of which Elisa is denied access to because of her gender.

From the moment he appears in the story, Henry is leaning against his tractor. Later, he drives his car to town. The tinker is associated with a cruder form of technology - he rides a wagon and makes his living sharpening tools - but it is a technology nonetheless. Elisa, on the other hand, doesn't seem to have access to this technology: she doesn't drive the car, and when she expresses an interest in riding in a wagon like the tinker's, he laughs it off, insisting that it would be inappropriate for her.

4.8.2 CLOTHING

Elisa's clothing changes as her muted, masculine persona becomes more feminine after the visit from the tinker. When the story begins, Elisa is wearing an androgynous gardening outfit, complete with heavy shoes, thick gloves, a man's hat, and an apron filled with sharp, phallic implements. The narrator even describes her body as "blocked and heavy." The masculinity of Elisa's clothing and shape reflects her asexual existence. After speaking with the tinker, however, Elisa begins to feel intellectually and physically stimulated, a change that is reflected in the removal of her gloves. She also removes her hat, showing her lovely hair. When the tinker leaves, Elisa undergoes an almost ritualistic transformation. She strips, bathes herself, examines her naked body in the mirror, and then dresses. She chooses to don fancy undergarments, a pretty dress, and makeup. These feminine items contrast sharply with her bulky gardening clothes and reflect the newly energized and sexualized Elisa. At the end of the story, after Elisa has seen the castoff shoots, she pulls up her coat collar to hide her tears, a gesture that suggests a move backward into the repressed state in which she has lived most, if not all, of her adult life.

4.9 METAPHORS AND SIMILES

4.9.1 A CLOSED POT

"The high grey-flannel fog of winter closed off the Salinas Valley from the sky and from all the rest of the world. On every side it sat like a lid on the mountains and made of the great valley a closed pot" (337).

Steinbeck, known for his powerful descriptions of settings, begins the story by using a simile to descrbe the fog over the Salinas Valley closing it in like a pot. This serves not merely to anchor the reader in the physical world of the story, but also to establish a closed-in, almost oppressive environment which mirrors the spiritual and internal oppression Elisa feels because of her gender.

4.9.2 UNWATERED FLOWERS

"The horse and the donkey drooped like unwatered flowers" (340).

Soon after the tinker arrives at the ranch, he stops his wagon; his horse and donkey, who have been pulling it, are described as "drooping like unwatered flowers", emphasizing their exhaustion, or perhaps their general weakness. This helps indicate the tinker's poverty and nomadic lifestyle - he has either been travelling for a while, looking for work, or is unable to afford quality animals that are able to pull his wagon competently.

4.9.3 A FAWNING DOG

"She crouched low like a fawning dog" (344)

As Elisa attempts to communicate her intuitive way with plants to the tinker, she becomes passionate, crouching on the ground and barely able to restrain herself from touching him. Here, the simile that she is crouched like a fawning dog helps emphasize how worked up she is, the extreme physical position she has put herself in through her excitement, and her willingness, in this moment, to submit physically to the tinker.

4.9.4 ELISA'S TERRIER FINGERS

"Her terrier fingers destroyed such pests before they could get started" (338)

Here, a metaphor is being used to compare Elisa's fingers to terriers. This creates a distinct, vivid image of how Elisa must garden, her fingers rooting out pests aggressively and thoroughly, not letting a single one go undisturbed. It also helps contribute to the image Steinbeck paints of Elisa as being "over-powerful" and excessively energetic.

4.9.5 A FOREST OF SPROUTS

"She took off a glove and put her strong fingers down into the forest of new green chrysanthemum sprouts that were growing around the old roots" (338)

The metaphor of the chrysanthemum sprouts coming up as a forest helps paint a clear picture of the abundance the sprouts must be growing in. This helps emphasize Elisa's obvious skill with the flowers.

4.10 IRONY

4.10.1 THE TINKER TAKING ELISA'S CHRYSANTHEMUMS

Elisa is an artist with her flowers; however, she is unable to share this artistry with others. She thinks she recognizes an opportunity to do this when the tinker arrives, because he promises to take her chrysanthemum sprouts and give them to a woman who longs for chrysanthemums in her own garden, however, ironically, the tinker taking her flowers actually does the opposite. He literally dumps them at the side of the road, destroying her artistry (and her hopes). He invented the woman only to get Elisa's sympathy -- and, ultimately, her business. Although initially he made her feel very positive about herself and her work, he ironically winds up being the source of great disappointment for her.

4.10.2 ELISA'S SKILL WITH AND CARE FOR PLANTS

There is something inherently ironic in Elisa's obvious skill with plants. Although she clearly has a "green thumb" and is a virtuoso when it comes to growing chrysanthemums, the futility of this skill, and the fact that she cannot share her artistry with anyone beyond the ranch, nor will her husband let her put it to practical use growing crops or otherwise contributing to their financial well-being means that her skill essentially comes to nothing.

Although she boasts throughout the story about how skilled she is, ironically, this skill actually contributes to her unhappiness, because she is unable to share her skills and artistry with the world, or alternately, use it for any practical utility.

4.10.3 THE WINE BEING ENOUGH

At the end of the story, Henry, baffled by his wife's strange questions about the boxing matches in town, offers to take her to them. She refuses, saying "It will be enough if we can have wine. It will be plenty" (348). Many critics have cited this as an example of irony in the text: although Elisa insists that wine is enough, her tears seem to suggest the exact opposite. Wine is a small risk, a miniature adventure compared to the freedom Elisa longs for. Although she insists to her husband that wine will be plenty, she actually needsmuch more than that to feel fulfilled.

4.10.4 HENRY'S OFFER

Confused by Elisa's questions about the boxing matches, Henry finally offers: "I don't think you'd like it, but I'll take you if you really want to go" (348). The irony of this offer is that although Henry believes he's being generous and magnanimous by making this offer, the very nature of the offer itself is oppressive and unappealing to Elisa. What she truly wants is freedom and independence: while being at the fights might provide the illusion of independence, for her husband to have to take her there (because she lacks a means of getting there herself) is fundamentally in opposition to this desire, and ensures she remains subordinate to Henry.

4.11 IMAGERY

4.11.1 THE GREY WEATHER

Steinbeck thoroughly paints a vivid image of the grey, dull weather surrounding Henry Allen's ranch throughout the story. The "grey-flannel fog of winter closed off the Salinas Valley from the sky" (337); later, Elisa sits and stares out at the "grey afternoon" (346). The dreariness of the setting, and the lack of color, is further reinforced by the mention of Elisa's chrysanthemums - although they are not yet in bloom, the reader can picture their eventual flowering, and how those vivid colos will contrast with this grey world. Like the flowers, Elisa has not "bloomed" either; she is trapped in a world as oppressively monotonous as the grey weather of the Salinas Valley.

4.11.2 HENRY AND ELISA'S HOUSE

Although a small moment in the story, Steinbeck uses equally vivid imagery to describe Henry and Elisa's "neat white farm house": "It was a hard-swept looking little house, with hard-polished windows, and a clean mud-mat on the front steps" (338). Just from this portrait, the reader can infer much about Elisa's skills as a housekeeper, and her ability to maintain "hard-polished" windows helps reinforce the "over-eager" and "over-powerful" (338) description Steinbeck has painted of her. The reader easily gets the impression that Elisa is bursting with repressed energy.

Additionally, the tidiness and cleanliness of the house lends it an impression of sterility, thematically mirroring Elisa and Henry's relationship, which lacks passion and true love.

4.11.3 THE TINKER

Steinbeck also uses rich imagery to describe the tinker. He explains that the tinker was "a very big man. Although his hair and beard were greying, he did not look old. His worn black suit was wrinkled and spotted with grease. The laughter had disappeared from his face and eyes the moment his laughing voice ceased. His eyes were dark, and they were full of the brooding that gets in the eyes of teamsters and of sailors. The calloused hands he rested on the wire fence were cracked, and every crack was a black line. He took off his battered hat" (340-1).

From this short burst of imagery, the reader can easily picture the tinker, and infer much about his personality. He is obviously poor and working class, having spent a lot of time outside working with his hands. He seems to have a cold, practical side to him, and be at least somewhat artificial in his politeness and warmth. His greying hair indicates that he has seen a lot, and is perhaps aging prematurely due to his hard life, but the fact that he doesn't "look old" would also suggest that he still has an energy and drive.

4.11.4 ELISA'S GARDENING OUTFIT

A great deal of detailed imagery is used to describe Elisa's gardening outfit at the beginning of the story. "Her figure looked blocked and heavy in her gardening costume, a man's black hat pulled low down over her eyes, clod-hopper shoes, a figured print dress almost completely covered by a big corduroy apron with four big pockets to hold the snips, the trowel and scratcher, the seeds and the knife she worked with. She wore heavy leather gloves to protect her hands while she worked" (338).

A clear image emerges of Elisa weighed down by a bulky, dark gardening outfit. This imagery helps emphasize Elisa's oppression not only physically by her clothes, but spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually by her position in life. As a woman, she is unable to do more than keep her house and garden, superfluous, unfulfilling tasks that

don't allow her to express herself artistically or provide for herself financially. The outfit she wears at the beginning of the story heightens this oppression.

4.12 LET US SUM UP

Steinbeck displays an extraordinary ability to delve into the complexities of a woman's consciousness. "The Chrysanthemums" is told in the third person, but the narration is presented almost entirely from Elisa's point of view. After the first few paragraphs that set the scene, Steinbeck shrugs off omniscience and refuses to stray from Elisa's head. This technique allows him to examine her psyche and show us the world through her eyes. We are put in her shoes and experience her frustrations and feelings. Because she doesn't know what Henry is discussing with the men in suits who come to the ranch, we don't know either. Because she sees the tinker as a handsome man, we do too. Because she watches his lips while he fixes her pots, we watch them with her. As a result, we understand more about her longings and character by the end of the story than her husband does.

Steinbeck's portrayal of Elisa seems even more remarkable considering that he wrote the story in 1938, when traditional notions of women and their abilities persisted in America. Many men unthinkingly accepted the conventional wisdom that working husbands and a decent amount of money were the only things women needed. Considered in this light, Steinbeck's sympathy and understanding for women are almost shockingly modern. On the face of it, Elisa seems to invite the disapproval of traditional men: she is overtly sexual, impatient with her husband, and dissatisfied with her life. Yet Steinbeck never condemns her and instead portrays the waste of her talent, energy, and ambition as a tragedy. Instead of asking us to judge Elisa harshly, he invites us to understand why she acts the way she does. As a result, his attitude toward her is more characteristic of a modern-day feminist than of a mid-twentieth-century male writer.

LESSON 5: W.W. JACOBS- A MONKEY'S PAW

5.1 AUTHOUR INTRODUCTION

William Wymark Jacobs(1863-1943), usually known as W.W. Jacobs, was a prominent Edwardian horror and crime writer, playwright, and humorist; he is perhaps best known for his 1902 short story, "The Monkey's Paw."

W. W. Jacobs received his degree from Birkbeck College. The satirical magazines *The Idler* and *Today* published some of his stories in the early 1890s. Jacobs's first short-story collection, *Many Cargoes* (1896), won popular acclaim, prompting him to quit working as a clerk and begin writing full-time.

He had spent a lot of time hanging around the wharves in London, and many of his short stories and novels concern seamen's lives and adventures. Jacobs's works include *The Skipper's Wooing* (1897), *Sea Urchins* (1898), *Light Freights* (1901), *Captains' All* (1902), *Sailors' Knots* (1909), and *Night Watches* (1914). Jacobs published thirteen collections of short stories, five novels, and a novella, many of which sold tens of thousands of copies. He also wrote a number of one-act plays. His financial security was further solidified by the popular *Strand* magazine, which began publishing Jacobs's short stories in 1898 and continued to do so throughout much of his life. Jacobs died in 1943.

While modern readers associate Jacobs primarily with his suspenseful and frequently anthologized short story "The Monkey's Paw" and, to a lesser degree, with his short story "The Toll House," his contemporaries primarily knew him as a comic writer. Like many comic writers of the day, Jacobs explored the lives of the lower and middle classes and published many of his stories in magazines directed at this audience. The novellas *At Sunwich Port* (1902) and *Dialstone Lane* (1904) exemplify his ability to create humorous scenarios with vivid characters. Jerome K. Jerome, a popular comic novelist of the day, was a great fan of Jacobs's and praised his strong work ethic and painstaking approach. He said that Jacobs would often rewrite just one sentence for hours at a stretch. Many luminaries of literature have praised Jacob's work, including G. K. Chesterton, Henry James, Evelyn Waugh, P. G. Wodehouse, and Mark Twain.

5.2 THE HORROR GENRE

"The Monkey's Paw" is a classic of the horror genre that has been copied and adapted numerous times in the century since it was first published. Jacobs wove many common and recognizable elements of the genre into the story: the story opens on a dark and stormy night, the Whites live on a deserted street, doors bang unexpectedly, stairs squeak, and silences are interrupted by the ticking of the clock. These elements heighten the tension and inform readers that something dreadful could occur at any moment. Another element of classic horror is Jacobs's transformation of the happy, loving White family into people who live amidst death and misery. Herbert's transformation is the most obvious, from a joking and playful son to a living corpse. Parts of Mr. and Mrs. White also die after Herbert's accident, and they become obsessed with death and the loss in their lives. Jacobs also draws from classic horror fiction when he plays off the White family's happiness with readers' sense of impending doom. As the Whites make lighthearted jokes about the monkey's paw, for example, readers cringe, sensing that disaster will soon strike.

5.3 WORK INTRODUCTION

"The Monkey's Paw" was published in Jacobs's short-story collection *The Lady of the Barge* (1902), and the story's popularity has been extraordinarily long-lasting. The story has been included in approximately seventy collections, from horror and gothic anthologies to the *New York Review of Books*' collection of classic fiction. The story has also been turned into a play, parodied on *The Simpsons*, and made into eight separate movies. Stephen King wrote about "The Monkey's Paw" in *The Dead Zone* (1979) and *Apt Pupil* (1982) and based his novel *Pet Sematary* (1983) on its themes. The spare but colorful characterization of the White family, fascination with wishing and wishing gone awry, and story's mix of humor and terror have made "The Monkey's Paw" popular with generations of readers.

5.4 SUMMARY

Part I opens on a dark and stormy night as the three members of the White family relax inside their cozy house. Herbert White and his father are playing a game of

chess while Mrs. White knits near the fire. After his son wins, Mr. White complains about the terrible weather and nearly deserted road they live near.

A family friend, Sergeant-Major Morris, arrives for a visit. Over whisky, he tells stories of his exploits abroad. Mr. White expresses interest in going to India, but the sergeant-major says he would be better off staying at home. At Mr. and Mrs. Whites' urging, Sergeant-Major Morris takes a small, mummified paw out of his pocket. He explains that a *fakir* (a mystic miracle worker) placed a spell on the paw to prove that people's lives are governed by fate and that it is dangerous to meddle with fate. According to the sergeant-major, three men can wish on the paw three times each. The sergeant-major himself has already had his three wishes, as has another man, who used his third wish to ask for death. The sergeant-major has considered selling the paw, but he doesn't want it to cause any more trouble than it already has. Moreover, no one will buy the paw without first seeing proof of its effect. The sergeant-major throws the paw into the fire, and Mr. White quickly rescues it. The sergeant-major warns him three times to leave the paw alone, but he eventually explains how to make a wish on the paw.

Mrs. White says the story reminds her of the *Arabian Nights* and jokingly suggests that her husband wish her a pair of extra hands to help her with all her work. The sergeant-major doesn't find this joke funny, however, and urges Mr. White to use common sense if he insists on wishing. After supper and more tales of India, the sergeant-major leaves. Herbert says he thinks the sergeant-major is full of nonsense and jokes that his father should make himself an emperor so that he doesn't have to listen to Mrs. White's nagging. In mock anger, Mrs. White playfully chases her son.

Mr. White says he has everything he wants and isn't sure what to wish for. Herbert says that two hundred pounds would enable them to pay off the money owed for the house. Mr. White wishes aloud for two hundred pounds as Herbert accompanies him with melodramatic chords played on the piano. Mr. White suddenly cries out and says that the paw moved like a snake in his hand. After Mr. and Mrs. White go to bed, Herbert sits by the fire and sees a vividly realistic monkey face in the flames. He puts out the fire, takes the monkey's paw, and goes to bed.

Part II begins on the next morning, a sunny winter day. The room seems cheerful and normal in contrast to the previous evening's gloomy atmosphere and the mummified paw now looks harmless. Mrs. White comments on how ridiculous the sergeant-major's story was but remarks that two hundred pounds couldn't do any harm. They could, Herbert jokes, if the money fell out of the sky onto his father's head. Mr. White answers that people often mistake coincidence for granted wishes. Herbert then leaves for work.

Later that day, Mrs. White notices a stranger outside dressed in nice clothes. The stranger hesitantly approaches their gate three times before opening it and coming up to the door. Mrs. White ushers him in. He nervously states that he is a representative of Maw and Meggins, Herbert's employer. Mrs. White asks whether Herbert is all right, and the representative says he is hurt, but in no pain. For a moment, Mrs. White feels relieved, until she realizes that Herbert feels no pain because he's dead. The representative says that Herbert was "caught in the machinery." After a pause, Mr. White says that Herbert was the only child they had left. Embarrassed, the representative stresses that he is simply obeying Maw and Meggins's orders. He then explains that the company will not take any responsibility for the death but will give the Whites two hundred pounds. Mrs. White shrieks, and Mr. White faints.

In Part III, the Whites bury Herbert. Several days pass, and the couple feels exhausted and hopeless. A week after the burial, Mr. White wakes up and hears his wife crying by the window. He gently urges her to come back to bed, but she refuses. He dozes off again until Mrs. White suddenly cries out that she wants the monkey's paw. In hysterics, she tells him to go downstairs and wish Herbert back to life. Mr. White resists and tells her that Herbert's death and the two hundred pounds they had received had nothing to do with his wish the previous night. Mr. White says that he didn't want to tell her before, but Herbert was so mangled that he had to identify the body by looking at the clothes. Mrs. White doesn't listen, however, and continues to insist on wishing Herbert back to life with the monkey's paw.

Mr. White retrieves the paw from its place downstairs. Mrs. White orders him to make the wish two more times until he finally complies. He makes the wish, and as they

wait, the candle goes out. They hear the clock, the creak of a stair, and the sound of a mouse. At last Mr. White goes downstairs. His match goes out, and before he can strike another, he hears a knock at the door. Another knock sounds, and Mr. White dashes upstairs. Mrs. White hears the third knock and says it's Herbert. She realizes he hadn't returned right after the wish had been made because he'd had to walk two miles from the graveyard to their house.

Mr. White begs her not to open the door, but she breaks free and runs downstairs. As she struggles to reach the bolt, the knocking becomes more insistent. Mr. White searches frantically for the paw, which had dropped to the floor. As Mrs. White pulls back the bolt, Mr. White finds the paw and makes a final wish. The knocking stops, and Mrs. White cries out. Mr. White dashes downstairs and sees that beyond the door, the street is empty.

5.5 ANALYSIS

"The Monkey's Paw" by W.W. Jacobs was first published in 1902 and seems to have shown up in one edition or another of just about every anthology of literature ever since. One reason for the story's ubiquitous publication history is that it is quite simply a masterpiece of literary economy. The story is surprisingly short considering its abundance of characters and incidents; it is the kind of tersely told story that fits in quite nicely among much shorter poems and much longer prose. Even readers who have never actually read the story composed by Jacobs are likely to be familiar with its macabre content that comes to a righteously ironic ending since "The Monkey's Paw" is not only widely anthologized, but also often parodied. *The Simpsons*, for instance, created one of their most memorable Halloween episode segments from the source material offered by Jacobs.

The story is certainly more about the plot and its message rather than the characters, for the Whites are rather thinly drawn. Herbert is a picture of youthful ignorance, Mrs. White is a grieving mother, and Mr. White is a weary and wise older gentleman. Their lack of depth is purposeful, however: it allows the reader to put themselves in the characters' shoes and see that it is not their profound character

failings but rather the simple and understandable element of human greed that brings about the Whites' deleterious circumstances.

Jacobs demonstrates a familiarity with folktales and classics of world literature, modeling the events of the story off of those in the *Arabian Nights* (as Mrs. White remarks). The traveler from a distant land, tales of the exotic and eerie, Indian holy men, and magical talismans are perfect hallmarks of these genres. This gives the story, set in an era of industrialism and imperialism, an aura of mystery.

Along with the juxtaposition of the modern (as seen in the factory in which Herbert works) and the primitive (the paw), the story derives its power from its ambiguity and hazy depiction of the tale. Much of the heavy lifting is actually done by the reader as they imagine within their minds the ghoulishness of Herbert's mangled body standing before the door of his house, banging frantically to get in. And, of course, the question must be asked: is the visitor really Herbert? Much, if not all, of what happens to the Whites can be seen as coincidence. Mr. White could have imagined the paw moved; after all, the mind, when stimulated, can play wondrous tricks. Herbert could have been killed due to an error of his own or merely a fluke of the machine. The two hundred pounds may simply have been what the firm chose to offer, independent of any trick of fate. The knocking at the door could have been the wind, a person playing a trick, or even the wild imaginings of grieving parents. It is this ambiguity that elevates the tale above merely a spooky story.

Expressing similar views, critic Grove Koger notes that the story is "effective not only for what Jacobs does but for what he refrains from doing. A master of economical, unobtrusive prose, he sets a cozy scene–a chess game in front of a fire, a cold and windy night outside–in just a few strokes. Only later does one realize how closely the rest of the story recapitulates the elements of this first brief scene, as the Whites make their moves in a fateful and fatal game while the forces of darkness swirl just beyond the comfortable circle of their lives." Koger also lauds the story's "gently humorous touches" which are alongside "macabre examples of what since has come to be known as black humor."

While one might not initially realize it, Jacobs did not intend for his horrific irony to induce merely melodramatic dread. The story of the accursedly detached simian anatomy could have been set in any time period of the past with just a few simple editing of the details. That the story is most definitely staged within the height of the British Empire during the Industrial Revolution is vital. “The Monkey’s Paw” is nothing less than a vicious critique of the British political, economic, and military systems of the day. The paw itself becomes a symbol of British colonialism and imperialism into foreign lands where indigenous peoples must either accept assimilation or face annihilation. The Eastern provenance of the paw and its curse can be seen as an agent of reckoning for the sins committed by the British in their ceaseless territorial expansion.

Likewise, the British capitalist system, which congealed from the steam and oil of the Industrial Revolution, falls under the glare of the author. His talisman of evil offers a juicy opportunity both to extend the possibility that the “curses” of the paw are mere coincidence and to rebuke a system grown so unwieldy with power that it quite literally has begun consuming its labor force. We see an economic system where those who own the means of production have become isolated and alienated from those actually responsible for the production of goods that create the profits they enjoy. Thus, employers have essentially begun a process of colonializing their own countrymen for the sake of exploitation: they act as if laborers were the backward, poverty-stricken natives in some foreign pagan country thousands of miles away. In the process, they have become exactly like the machines they run 24-hours-a-day. Not only do owners refuse to admit culpability for the daily acts of manslaughter taking place in their factories, but by their very act of handing over a token payment that falls far short of being adequate compensation for the value of a human life, they also prove they do not even possess the necessary emotional components to realize they actually are guilty.

The other primary theme at work in "The Monkey's Paw" is directly expressed by the fakir who introduces the talisman to the mechanized world of the British, far away from his own world of spiritualism and the occult. According to the Sergeant-Major from the British military, at any rate, the fakir “wanted to show that fate ruled people's lives, and that those who interfered with it did so to their sorrow.” That theme of predetermination of fate versus free will to chart one’s own destiny is put on explicit

display throughout the tale's focus on the wishes that are made and the consequences that arrive from the combination of existing fate and the desire to change it. It is in the way that both main themes of the story are implicitly intertwined that "The Monkey's Paw" achieves its greatest level of meaning.

The unspoken reality is that the fate which is transformed by the wishes upon the monkey's paw are themselves reflected by the wishes already made within a system that is hopelessly fixed against a family like the Whites. The truth of the matter is that Herbert's tragic fate is already sealed. Either he will live a long life as a mechanized drone serving to fuel the industry creating the economic wealth that powers the colonialist politics and imperialist military incursions abroad…or he will join that military and become a mechanized drone living out the very same in a way that differs only in the clothing he wears and the climate in which he wears them.

The ultimately irony of "The Monkey's Paw" has nothing to do with the wishes made upon it: the irony is that Herbert White is destined to live a meaningless life in service to the crown and die a meaningless death in service to the crown whether a monkey on the other side of the globe ever lost its paw or not.

5.6 CHARACTERS LIST

5.6.1 HERBERT WHITE

The possible transformation of Herbert White from a gentle, happy, and devoted young man into a threatening monster is the central horror of "The Monkey's Paw." A thoughtful and loving son, Herbert plays chess with his father and gently teases his mother. He is the only member of the family who works, so readers can assume that he supports his parents in their old age. Herbert believes that Sergeant-Major Morris's stories are nothing but a pack of tall tales and treats the monkey's paw with irreverent humor. He encourages his father to wish for an emperorship and then jokingly suggests he wish for two hundred pounds to pay off the mortgage. Herbert does not believe for a moment that the paw is magical, but he unwittingly predicts the outcome of the wish when he tells his parents that he knows he'll never see the money. The sunny, skeptical quality of Herbert's nature makes his eventual transformation, induced by his father's wish, more horrifying. Mr. White fears that his son has become a horribly mangled, evil

being, after wishing him back to life. The fact that Jacobs never actually describes who—or what—knocks repeatedly on the Whites' door, however, suggests that the caller may not really be Herbert's revived corpse.

5.6.2 MRS. WHITE

Mr. and Mrs. White also undergo an upsetting change, transforming from a happy couple into parents racked by grief. During the sergeant-major's visit, Mrs. White is as eager as Herbert and Mr. White are to hear the tales of his exploits abroad. She is more willing to consider the truth of the monkey-paw story than Herbert is, but she is far less credulous than her husband. Indeed, she often shows herself to be more quick-witted than Mr. White. For example, she understands the significance of the Maw and Meggins representative's visit before her husband does, and she is the one to suggest wishing on the monkey's paw a second time to bring Herbert back to life. The death of her son and the belief that it might have been prevented nearly drive Mrs. White insane. Her transformation is far less dramatic than her son's, but she still changes from an intelligent, self-possessed woman into a raving, shrieking, weeping mourner.

5.6.3 MR. WHITE

Mr. White's grief is twofold as he laments his son's death as well as his decision to wish on the monkey's paw in the first place. Unlike his wife, Mr. White realizes he should have never invited trouble by wishing for the two hundred pounds or to bring Herbert back to life. The fact that he believes an unholy creature stands knocking at his door instead of his son suggests that he feels guilty for having let selfishness overtake him when he made his wishes. Instead of passing off the knocking as an unrelated coincidence, he immediately jumps to the conclusion that evil stands on the other side, as if believing the paw has punished him for being greedy. His decision to wish the unwanted visitor away with his third wish may reflect his desire to not only save his and Mrs. White's lives, but also redeem himself for his sins.

5.6.4 SERGEANT-MAJOR MORRIS

A friend of the Whites. A mysterious and possibly sinister figure, Sergeant-Major Morris enjoys talking about his adventures abroad and shows the Whites his monkey's

paw, in spite of his professed reservations. A jaded and world-weary man, he discourages Mr. White from dreaming of India, suggesting that life is better and simpler at home in England. He throws the monkey's paw into the fire and urges Mr. White not to make any wishes, but he ultimately tells him exactly how to make a wish.

5.6.5 THE REPRESENTATIVE

The man who informs Mr. and Mrs. White of Herbert's death. The nervous representative sympathizes with the Whites and tries to distance himself from Maw and Meggins's failure to take responsibility, stressing that he is following orders and not expressing his own feelings. He gives Mr. and Mrs. White two hundred pounds from the company.

5.7 THEMES

5.7.1 THE DANGER OF WISHING

The Whites' downfall comes as the result of wishing for more than what they actually needed. Even though Mr. White feels content with his life—he has a happy family, a comfortable home, and plenty of love—he nevertheless uses the monkey's paw to wish for money that he doesn't really need. As Jacobs suggests, making one seemingly harmless wish only intensifies and magnifies desire as each subsequent wish becomes more outlandish. After receiving two hundred pounds for Herbert's death, for example, Mrs. White jumps to the conclusion that the paw has unlimited power. She forces Mr. White to wish to bring Herbert back to life, a wish far more serious than their first. Unchecked greed, therefore, only leads to unhappiness, no matter how much more one asks for. Intense desire also often leads to unfulfilled expectations or unintended consequences as with Herbert's unexpected death and rise from the grave as a living corpse. Put simply, Jacobs is reminding readers to be careful what they wish for because it may just come true.

5.7.2 THE CLASH BETWEEN DOMESTICITY AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD

Jacobs depicts the Whites' home and domestic sphere in general as a safe, cozy place separate from the dangerous world outside. The Whites' house is full of symbols of happy domesticity: a piano, knitting, a copper kettle, a chessboard, a fireplace, and a

breakfast table. But the Whites repeatedly invite trouble into this cozy world. Sergeant-Major Morris—a family friend, seasoned veteran, and world traveler—disrupts the tranquility in the Whites' home with his stories of India and magic and warnings of evil. He gives Mr. White the monkey's paw, the ultimate token of the dangerous outside world. Mr. and Mrs. White mar the healthy atmosphere of their home again when they invite the Maw and Meggins representative inside, a man who shatters their happiness with news of Herbert's death. The final would-be invader of the domestic world is Herbert himself. Mr. White's terrified reaction to his dead son's desire for entrance suggests not just his horror at the prospect of an animated corpse, but his understanding, won from experience, that any person coming from the outside should be treated as a dangerous threat to the sanctity of the home.

5.7.3 SUPERSTITION

The story never explicitly states that the paw was the reason for Herbert's death, nor does it reveal whether the mysterious knocker at the White's home is in fact an undead Herbert. Both events could be a coincidence: the money could have simply happened to be the amount they wished for; the knocking could be a stranger, animals, a trick of nature, etc. This uncertainty makes the reader question the nature of reality, leading them to believe in the supernatural rather than the logical. Superstition is thus one of the most important forces in the short tale because of how it affects the reader.

5.7.4 GREED

The Whites are a content, happy family. They want for nothing, as Mr. White mentions when he thinks of what to make as his first wish. He wishes out of greed, not out of necessity. They face the consequences of upsetting an equilibrium and asking for too much. It is especially telling that Herbert, the one who wants wealth and fame the most, is the one taken by death. Even the second wish is selfish and not rational – it is purely driven by emotion and what Mrs. White wants. This greed leads to disappointment and the downfall of the Whites; greed and lust for something one does not need can lead to tragic consequences.

5.7.5 INTERFERING WITH FATE

The story's main character, an elderly man named Mr. White, is told of a monkey's paw that has the power to grant three wishes. Despite being warned about the mysterious talisman–he learns that it had a had a spell put on it by a fakir (holy man) from India who wanted people to understand the dangers of interfering with fate–he takes the paw and wishes for money. His son then dies in an accident, and the family is given the money they wished for. This event emphasizes the story's theme, which is that interfering with fate, especially when driven by greed, leads to tragedy. The tale continues with the fulfillment of two additional wishes due to the supernatural force of the monkey's paw.

5.8 SYMBOL

5.8.1 THE MONKEY'S PAW

The monkey's paw is a symbol of desire and greed—everything that its owner could possibly wish for and the unrestricted ability to make it happen. This power makes the paw alluring, even to unselfish people who desire nothing and have everything they need. Mr. White, for example, hastily retrieves the paw from the fire, even though he himself admits that he wouldn't know what to wish for if he owned the paw. Its potential also prompts Herbert to half-jokingly suggest wishing for money the Whites don't really need, ostensibly just to see what happens. The paw grants Mr. White's wishes by killing Herbert and raising his corpse from the grave in an unexpected and highly sinister twist. At the same time, however, the paw's omnipotent power may be misperceived, because Herbert's death may have been entirely coincidental and the knocks on the door may be from someone other than his living corpse.

5.8.2 CHESS

Chess symbolizes life in "The Monkey's Paw." Those who play a daring, risky game of chess, for example, will lose, just as those who take unnecessary risks in life will die. When the story opens, Mr. White and Herbert play chess by the fire, and the game's outcome mirrors the story's outcome. Mr. White, the narrator explains, has a theory of "radical changes" concerning chess. He takes terrible, unnecessary risks with

his king, risks that make his wife nervous as she watches the game unfold. As he plays, he notices that he has made a mistake that will prove deadly. The risks and mistakes Mr. White makes playing chess parallel the risks and mistakes he makes wishing on the monkey's paw. These mistakes ultimately lead to Herbert's death, the most "radical change" of all.

5.9 MOTIF

5.9.1 COLD WIND

Cold wind is a constant in the story, as it serves as a foreshadowing to several events. It is present when the Whites are waiting for General Morris to arrive, who brings the dooming talisman, when the representative from Maw and Meggins brings the news of their son, and finally on the night when the Whites wish their son back to life and reanimate a corpse.

5.9.2 GROUPS OF THREE

Jacobs's story is structured around a pattern of threes. The central force of the story is the monkey's paw, which will grant three separate owners three wishes each. The White family is made up of three people. Mr. White is the third owner of the paw. (The second owner is Sergeant-Major Morris; the first owner used his third wish for death.) Sergeant-Major Morris begins talking about his adventures in India after three glasses of whisky and urges Mr. White three times not to wish on the paw. The representative from Maw and Meggins approaches the Whites' gate three times before he musters up the courage to walk up the path to their door. Mrs. White orders her husband three times to wish Herbert alive again before he retrieves the paw. And the reanimated corpse of Herbert knocks three times before his mother hears him. In addition to permeating the plot, the number three gives "The Monkey's Paw" its structure. The story is broken up into three parts, which take place at three times of day, during three types of weather. Part I occurs in the evening during a rainstorm. Part II takes place during the morning of a bright winter day. Part III is set in the middle of a chilly, windy night.

By stressing threes, Jacobs taps into a number of associations that are common in Western culture. Most relevant to the story is the saying “bad luck comes in threes.” One well-known trinity, or three, is from Christian theology, in which God is composed of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Disregard for threes has been superstitiously equated with disregard for the trinity. In the case of Jacobs’s characters, faith in a non-Christian totem (the paw) may be interpreted as disrespect for Christianity. Finally, because twos commonly occur in nature (we have two legs, two eyes, two hands, and so on), threes are often used in literature to produce a perverse or unnatural effect.

5.10 ALLEGORY

5.10.1 THE HOLY TRINITY

Keeping in mind the motif of three, one of the most common representations of a group of three in Western culture is the Holy Trinity from Christianity. It refers to Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. The monkey's paw hails from a faraway land where it was cursed by an Indian holy man – making it an anti-Christian symbol. Hence it disregards Christianity and the Holy Trinity, bringing unfortunate consequences to the family that indulges in it.

5.11 ALLUSIONS

Jacobs drew from a number of widely known literary sources in writing “The Monkey’s Paw” to make the story both familiar and unsettling. His most recognizable influence was the tale of Aladdin and the magic lamp, one of the more famous tales in *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights*, or simply *Arabian Nights,* as Mrs. White calls it. There are numerous variations to the Aladdin story—including Walt Disney’s popular cartoon of the 1990s—but nearly all of them suggest that successful wishing is impossible because magic never works the way people want it to work. Jacobs also uses the same structural pattern in “The Monkey’s Paw” featured in most other “three wishes” stories: the first wish leads to unexpected and dissatisfying results, the hastily made second wish fails to reverse the first wish and only worsens the situation, and the third wish manages to undo the disastrous second wish.

Jacobs's less obvious sources of inspiration, however, include the Bible and stories of Faust, the German scholar who sells his soul in exchange for the devil's service. Mr. White recoils in horror after wishing on the monkey's paw for the first time, insisting that the paw moved like a snake in his hand. This snake alludes to the biblical story of Adam and Eve, in which Eve discovers that the seemingly delicious fruit brings only misery. Similarly, the Whites—whose surname suggests unsullied innocence—discover that the powerful monkey's paw grants wishes with a heavy price. And just as in the Faust stories, the fulfillment of Mr. and Mrs. White's wishes brings only pain and suffering to others and therefore fail to satisfy them.

5.12 SIMILE

5.12.1 MR. WHITE'S FACE

Jacobs compares Mr. White's face when he learns his son is dead to that of Morris's visage when he went into battle: "...on the husband's face was a look such as his friend the sergeant might have carried into his first action."

5.13 METAPHOR

5.13.1 KNOCKS

Jacobs describes the (putative) dead Herbert's knocks on the door as a "perfect fusillade." This evocation of artillery, of war, enhances the terror of the moment. It raises the scene to an epic battle between the forces of darkness and fate and the diminutive figures of Mr. and Mrs. White.

5.14 IRONY

5.14.1 DRAMATIC IRONY: WISHES

There is a great deal of irony in regards to all of the wishes made by the people possessing the paw. The first man's last wish was for death, and, technically, so is Mr. White's – for the death of his already-dead son. There is irony in the fact that Herbert dies when he was the most excited for the money. There is also irony in that the Whites think the paw will bring blessings, when it instead brings curses.

5.15 IMAGERY

5.15.1 FACES

Mr. White sits before the dying fire and imagines he sees terrible, simian faces in it; this is a creepy and powerful image that foreshadows the doom to come.

5.15.2 THE DEAD HERBERT

While Jacobs does not fully describe Herbert's mangled body and what he might look like raised from the dead, he gives readers just enough to conjure up a terrible and frightening image in their head; herein lies some of the potency of the way in which Jacobs tells his tale.

5.15.3 THE NIGHT

The image of Mr. and Mrs. White waiting in the flickering candlelight for Herbert, the slow expiration of the candle, their silent trudge back to their cold bed, and their mournful rest is sorrowful as well as ominous, for the reader expects that something will interrupt this quiet darkness soon enough.

5.15.4 THE DESERTED ROAD

The very last image is a quietly spooky one: having gathered courage after the knocking stopped, the Whites look out their door and see nothing but a street lamp flickering on a deserted road. All is silent, and there is no trace of their dead son. This image calls into question everything that has just happened, or *not* happened. Was it really Herbert? Was there really knocking at all? If it was Herbert, where is he now? What exactly did Mr. White wish for?

5.16 LET US SUM UP

The Monkey's Paw" is a chilling and suspenseful short story by W.W Jacobs, first included in *Harper's Magazine* and then published in England in 1902 in his collection "The Lady of the Barge." The story has been included in dozens of collections, from horror and gothic anthologies to *The New York Review of Books*' collection of classic fiction. In the story, Jacobs renders a creepy spin on the classic three-wishes folk tale of "Arabian Nights." The story revolves around a couple, Mr. and Mrs. White, and their

son, Herbert. Upon a visit from an old friend, they acquire a magical artifact – a monkey's paw. Anyone who owns it gets three wishes granted, but it becomes clear that the wishes come with a catch: whoever makes the wish must pay a great price. When the Whites wish for money, they end up receiving the wished-for amount as compensation for their son's death. After a grieving, desperate Mrs.White wishes her son back to life, he returns to them from the dead as a zombie-like creature. At the last moment Mr. White uses the third wish to send him back to the peace of the grave. Jacobs uses foreshadowing to increase suspense in this tale, along with setting and imagery to add to the eeriness. A combination of horror and humor have made "The Monkey's Paw" popular with generations of readers.

There have been several different media adaptations of "The Monkey's Paw," one of the first being a one-act play in 1903, in which famous dramatist Louis Napoleon Parker performed at the London Haymarket Theatre. There have also been other plays, operas, a radio reading, eight separate films, and (most popularly) an episode of "The Simpsons." Stephen King even based his novel "Pet Sematary" (1983) on the themes of this story.

5.17 REFERENCE

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Self Assessment Questions:

Two marks:

2.1

Clarify the themes of justice and personal desire intersect in "A Lady or the Tiger".

In "A Lady or the Tiger," the themes of justice and personal desire intersect through the king's conflict between his duty to uphold the law and his love for his daughter. The story raises questions about the nature of justice and morality, highlighting the tension between doing what is right and doing what is personally desirable. Ultimately, the king's decision has far-reaching consequences.

Explain the significance of the ambiguous ending.

The ambiguous ending forces readers to confront the complexity of human emotions, particularly jealousy and love. It leaves the reader questioning whether the princess chose to save her lover or doom him, highlighting the unpredictability of human nature.

Draw a outline of the story that challenge the concept of justice.
The story questions the fairness of a justice system based on arbitrary fate, as the choice between the lady or the tiger is left to chance. It reflects on the randomness of outcomes that could be influenced by personal motives rather than moral righteousness.

2.2

What role does the setting play in creating the eerie atmosphere of "The Fall of the House of Usher"?

The setting of "The Fall of the House of Usher" plays a significant role in creating the eerie atmosphere, with the old, crumbling mansion serving as a symbol of the decay and rot of the Usher family. The remote location and dark, gloomy surroundings contribute to the sense of foreboding and dread. The setting also reflects the characters' emotional states, adding to the overall sense of unease.

Elucidate how does Poe explore the theme of madness in the story.

Poe explores madness through the character of Roderick Usher, whose mental deterioration parallels the collapse of the house. His hypersensitivity and irrational fears reflect a descent into madness that ultimately consumes him and his twin.

Describe the symbolic meaning of the house's collapse at the end.
The collapse of the house symbolizes the destruction of the Usher family line and the inescapable link between the family's fate and the mansion. It represents the culmination of psychological, familial, and physical decay.

2.3
Discuss Elisa's character in "The Chrysanthemums" embody the struggle for female empowerment and identity.

Elisa's character in "The Chrysanthemums" embodies the struggle for female empowerment and identity through her desire for creative expression and connection. She feels trapped in her life and desires something more, symbolizing the constraints placed on women. Elisa's character serves as a powerful representation of female empowerment, highlighting the need for self-expression and fulfillment.

Explain how Elisa's interaction with the tinker reflect her inner conflict.
Elisa's interaction with the tinker awakens a sense of freedom and desire for adventure, but it also reminds her of the boundaries imposed on her as a woman. She is drawn to his free life but realizes it is inaccessible to her.

How does Steinbeck portray gender roles through Elisa's character?
Steinbeck portrays Elisa's frustration with rigid gender roles through her emotional reactions and suppressed ambitions. Despite her competence and strength, she is confined to her domestic role, reflecting broader societal restrictions on women.

2.4

Confer the message does "A Monkey's Paw" convey about the dangers of meddling with fate and the supernatural.

"A Monkey's Paw" conveys a cautionary message about the dangers of meddling with fate and the supernatural, highlighting the unintended consequences of tampering with forces beyond human control. The story shows how the pursuit of wealth and happiness can lead to tragic outcomes, serving as a warning against the dangers of greed and hubris. Ultimately, the story suggests that some things are better left alone.

Describe how does Jacobs create suspense in the story.
Jacobs creates suspense through the slow build-up of ominous warnings, foreshadowing, and the gradual revelation of the paw's sinister powers. The tension heightens as the characters' wishes lead to devastating outcomes.

What moral lesson does "The Monkey's Paw" convey?
The story conveys the lesson that tampering with fate can have dire consequences, and that one should be careful of what they wish for. It highlights the unpredictability of life and the dangers of greed.

Five Marks:

1. In "A Lady or the Tiger," how does the author use the theme of justice vs. personal desire to explore the complexities of the kingdom's legal system? Analyze the characters' motivations and the implications of the ending.

2. Imagine an alternative ending to "A Lady or the Tiger" where the princess is not sacrificed. How would this change the themes and character development in the story?
3. Describe the setting of "The Fall of the House of Usher" and its significance to the plot. How does the crumbling house reflect the decay of the Usher family?

4. Analyze the use of symbolism in "The Fall of the House of Usher," particularly the crumbling house and the twins. What do they represent, and how do they contribute to the overall themes of decay and madness?

5. In "The Chrysanthemums," how does the author portray the theme of loneliness and isolation through Elisa's character? Analyze her interactions with other characters and the symbolism of the chrysanthemums.
6. .
7. Write a parallel story from Henry's perspective, exploring his thoughts and feelings about Elisa and their life together in "The Chrysanthemums."

8. Summarize the plot of "A Monkey's Paw," highlighting the key events and character actions that lead to the tragic outcome.

9. Analyze the author's use of foreshadowing and tension in creating a sense of unease and dread in "A Monkey's Paw." What techniques does Jacobs use to build suspense?

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Eight Marks :

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of the ending of "A Monkey's Paw" in conveying the themes and message. Consider alternative endings and their implications for the story's meaning.
2. Identify the themes of fate, death, and the supernatural in "A Monkey's Paw." How do these themes intersect and reinforce each other?
3. Imagine Elisa's life after the events of "The Chrysanthemums." How might she have changed, and what opportunities might she have pursued? Write a continuation of the story exploring these possibilities
4. Assess the effectiveness of Poe's use of suspense and foreshadowing in creating a sense of dread and horror in "The Fall of the House of Usher."

5. Classify the narrator's role in "The Fall of the House of Usher" and their relationship with the Usher family. What biases or limitations does the narrator bring to the story?
6. Write a sequel to "A Lady or the Tiger," exploring the consequences of the events in the original tale. How do the characters adapt to the new reality, and what new conflicts arise?

Unit III

British Literature

UNIT III BRITISH LITERATURE

LESSON 6: OSCAR WILDE- THE MODEL MILLIONAIRE

6.1 AUTHOR INTRODUCTION

Oscar Wilde was born into a distinguished Anglo-Irish family in Dublin, Ireland, in 1854. His mother's love for poetry instilled in him a lifelong devotion to literature, and he excelled early at Classics. His studies took him to Oxford in 1874, where he joined ranks with the burgeoning Aesthetic and Decadent movements, which promoted "art for art's sake." In the years after university, he broke into London high society, where his good looks, outspoken behavior, and biting wit made him a celebrity. He proved that his fame was well-earned by producing a steady stream of quality poems, stories, and plays—including the enduringly popular 1895 play *The Importance of Being Earnest*—that skewered the Victorian morality of his day while maintaining a light touch and a mastery of humor and irony. His 1891 novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* scandalized English readers with its homoerotic undercurrents and frank promotion of artistic hedonism. The scandal proved fateful: in 1895, Wilde's personal enemies brought him to trial for "gross indecency," invoking *Dorian Gray* as evidence. They were able to prove that Wilde, married with children, had indeed been carrying on homosexual affairs with younger men—a crime at the time. Wilde was sentenced to two years of hard labor. Debilitated by his prison ordeal, Wilde made off to France upon his release, spending his final few years there in grim poverty and dying of meningitis in 1900.

6.2WORK INTRODUCTION

The Model Millionaire first appeared in the newspaper The World in June 1887. It was published as a part of the anthology, *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and other Stories.*

The story revolves around Hughie Erskine, a charming but poor young man, and his pursuit of Laura Leaf, a beautiful and wealthy woman. One day, he was emotionally moved at the sight of an elderly beggar, who was posing as a model for his artist friend. He gave the old beggar the largest value coin that he had in his pocket. Hughie was handsomely rewarded for his kindness.

The story is filled with clever observations about love, wealth, and society.

6.3 SUMMARY

A young man named Hughie Erskine acts as the story's protagonist. Hughie is attractive, endearing, and well-liked, but he has yet to have the best of success when it comes to money. In his father's will, he received absolutely nothing of considerable worth. His attempts at several various enterprises have all failed.

Hughie receives $200 annually from an old aunt as his only source of income because he is unemployed. Laura Merton, a young woman, and Hughie have fallen in love, and she reciprocates.

Colonel Merton, Laura's father, likes Hughie but does not want the young man to marry his daughter because of his poor financial outlook. He has frequently warned Hughie that he will only let him propose to Laura once he has made ten thousand pounds.

Hughie visits Alan Trevor, a buddy who is an artist. He discovers that Alan is portraying an elderly man who looks like a beggar in the picture. The elderly man is dressed in worn-out boots and a brown coat that has seen better days. On the one hand, he is holding a crude walking stick.

He is putting out an old hat with the other hand as if to make a donation request. He has deep lines on his face and a very depressed expression.

Alan and Hughie agree that the old man would make an excellent painting subject. But Hughie can't help but feel bad for the guy. He considers it unfair because, even though Alan's paintings are frequently worth two thousand guineas, he only pays his models one shilling per hour for their time and does not share with them any of the proceeds from the sales of their portraits.

Upon Alan's departure, Hugh searches his pockets. He discovers that a sovereign is his most extraordinary denomination coin. Hughie hands the elderly guy the coin, who looks delighted to get it, even though he must make more cuts than expected for the remaining month. Hughie departs shortly after.

The two subsequently cross paths with Hughie. The artist reports that the elderly guy asked him many questions after he had already departed. Alan continues by saying

that he told the elderly guy everything he knew about Hughie, Laura Merton, and the restriction Colonel Merton placed on their ability to be married. Hughie is upset because his pal revealed his personal information to "that old beggar."

Hughie is amused when Alan reveals that the elderly guy he painted was Baron Hausberg, one of Europe's wealthiest people and a frequent purchaser of his artwork. The millionaire baron requested to be painted as a beggar for reasons Alan is still determining.

He was dressed in ragged clothing Alan had given him. Hughie feels guilty for giving a millionaire a penny, but Alan reassures him that it is nothing to be concerned about.

The next day, a representative of Baron Hausberg delivers an envelope to Hughie's home. According to the text on the envelope, it is a wedding gift "from an old beggar." Hughie discovers a 10 thousand pound cheque inside the package. Hughie and Laura marry. Baron Hausberg is present for their marriage.

6.4 ANALYSIS

The protagonist of the story is a young man called Hughie Erskine. Hughie is handsome, charming and popular but he has been very unlucky as far as financial matters are concerned. He was left nothing of any great value in his father's will. He has tried his hand at several different businesses, all of which have failed. Having no job, Hughie's only source of income is two hundred pounds a year which is given to him by an elderly aunt. Hughie has fallen in love with a young woman named Laura Merton and she loves him in return. Laura's father, Colonel Merton, is fond of Hughie but, due to his poor financial prospects, he does not want the young man to marry his daughter. He has often told Hughie that he will only allow him to get engaged to Laura after he has earned ten thousand pounds.

Hughie goes to see his artist friend Alan Trevor. He finds that Alan is painting a portrait of an old man who appears to be a beggar. The old man is wearing a tattered brown cloak and boots which have been mended many times. He has a rough walking stick in one hand. In the other hand, he is holding out an old hat as if to ask for money.

His face is heavily wrinkled and he looks extremely sad. Both Alan and Hughie agree that the old man is an excellent subject for a painting. Hughie, however, cannot help feeling sorry for the man. He thinks it is unfair that, although Alan's paintings regularly sell for two thousand guineas, he only pays his models one shilling an hour to pose for him and does not give them a percentage of the money which he makes from sales of their portraits.

When Alan leaves the room, Hughie looks in his pockets. He finds that the highest denomination coin which he has is a sovereign. Although it means that he will have to economize more than usual for the rest of the month, Hughie gives the coin to the old man, who appears very happy to receive it. Hughie leaves soon afterwards.

Alan and Hughie meet up again later. The artist tells his friend that, after he left, the old man asked several questions about him. Alan goes on to say that he told the old man all about Hughie, Laura Merton and the condition which Colonel Merton set that prevents their marriage. Hughie is unhappy that his friend told "that old beggar" all about his private life. The amused Alan tells Hughie that the old man he was painting was Baron Hausberg, one of the wealthiest men in Europe and someone who often buys Alan's paintings. For reasons which Alan does not really understand, the millionaire baron had asked to be painted as a beggar. The tattered clothes he was wearing were supplied by Alan. Hughie feels ashamed about having given a coin to a millionaire, although Alan tells him not to worry.

The following day, a representative of Baron Hausberg comes to Hughie's house with an envelope. The writing on the envelope says that it contains a wedding present "from an old beggar". Inside the envelope, Hughie finds a check for ten thousand pounds. Hughie and Laura get married. Baron Hausberg attends their wedding.

6.5 CHARACTERS

6.5.1 HUGHIE ERSKINE

Hughie Erskine was a young man, who was good-looking with crisp brown hair and grey eyes. He was charming, he was not only popular among men but also among women. But intellectually we must admit he was not of much importance.

He was simply unable to make money. He survived on an allowance of two hundred pounds a year given by an old aunt. His father had left him with an inheritance of a cavalry sword and History of the Peninsular War in fifteen volumes. In order to earn money he had tried the stock exchange, worked under a tea merchant and sold dry sherry. Thus, he was a delightful, ineffectual young man with a perfect profile and no profession. He was in love with a girl named Laura Merton, daughter of a retired Colonel. The Colonel liked Hughie but was against the engagement. He would allow them to get married only if Hughie had ten thousand pounds of his own. This made Hughie sad. Though he was unable to marry Laura because of the condition put up by her father, both he and Laura were madly in love. He would visit Laura every day. The rest of the time he would tire out his friends talking about Laura. One day on his way to Laura's place he dropped in to see his friend Alan Trevor who was an artist and an excellent painter. Trevor liked Hughie for his good looks, so he had given him the permanent entry to his studio.

Here Hughie saw Trevor finishing the portrait of a beggar. The model for the painting was a poor piteous beggar. The state of the beggar moved Hughie to dig in his pockets and give the beggar the largest denomination coin he had. Hughie left the studio. Laura scolded him for his extravagance. Later that evening he met Trevor who claimed to have finished and framed his painting. Trevor told Hughie that the model was interested in the latter and had made enquiries about him and Laura. Hughie was afraid that the beggar had seen that he had a soft corner for the beggar so he would harass him for money. Hughie became red and angry. But the next moment he felt shocked and ashamed when Trevor told him that the beggar was actually Baron Hausberg, a very rich man who had commissioned Trevor to paint him as a beggar. Hughie confessed to giving the richest man, 'a sovereign'. Alan had a hearty laugh and the embarrassed Hughie rushed home. The next morning, he had a visitor, a messenger from Baron Hausberg. Baron had sent Hughie 10,000 pounds as a wedding gift. Hughie was able to finally marry Laura and Trevor was the best-man in the wedding and Baron made a speech at their wedding breakfast.

6.5.2 ALAN TREVOR

Alan Trevor was a painter and also an artist. He has been described as a "strange rough fellow, with a freckled face and a red ragged beard" whose art is well received by critics and patrons. He believed that beautiful people should rule the world. He liked beauty and intellect. But Alan's definition of beauty even included someone wearing rags. Alan was a hard worker in comparison with Hughie's more relaxed nature. He was totally amused by Hughie's act of giving a sovereign to the beggar. When Baron dressed as an ugly beggar enquired about Hughie, Alan gave him information about Hughie's poverty and his inability to marry Laura.Later, Alan served as Hughie's best-man at the wedding.

6.5.3 BARON HAUSBERG

Baron Hausberg was one of the wealthiest men in Europe but he was an odd fellow. He had commissioned Trevor, a master artist, to paint him as a beggar rather than the grand man he was.

Hughie felt sorry on seeing Baron's piteous condition that he gave him a sovereign-almost all the money he had. Baron was attracted to the kindness Hughie showed and when he came to know about Hughie and Laura, he decided to help them by giving Hughie 10,000 pounds as a wedding gift.

6.5.4 LAURA MERTON

Laura Merton is Hughie's love interest. She adored Hughie as well. Laura is apparently quite good-looking herself. Her protective father, Colonel Merton didn't allow her and Hughie to marry unless he had 10,000 pounds.

6.5.5 COLONEL MERTON

Colonel Merton is a minor but an important character in the story. He is the father of Hughie's love interest, Laura. He had served in the army and had been posted to India. He lost his temper frequently and his digestion was disturbed. He was not very rich either. He wanted a better life for his daughter, hence he put the condition of Hughie having ten thousand pounds before getting engaged. He liked Hughie but he knew that Hughie was neither smart nor rich.

6.6 TITLE ANALYSIS

The title is suitable for the story as the millionaire model was actually a model millionaire. Baron Hausberg was the model millionaire, the model who was a millionaire. He was one of the richest men in Europe. He could buy all of London and had a house in every capital city. He ate his food in gold plates. As per the author, he could even stop Russia from going to war.

Baron had commissioned Alan Trevor to paint a life-size picture of him dressed as a beggar. As a model he looked so wretched that Hughie felt pity for him. After Hughie had left, Baron made enquiries about Hughie. He learned from Alan that Hughie had financial difficulty. Baron decided to help Hughie overcome this difficulty. He sent a wedding present of 10,000 pounds for Hughie and Laura.

The rich people in Victorian times rarely helped the poor. Baron showed his generosity by helping a poor man in his hour of need. Hence, the millionaire model acted as a model millionaire.

6.7 THEMES

6.7.1 GENEROSITY

Even though Hughie is poor himself, he is genuinely touched by the plight of the old beggar and offers him a generous gift. This act of unexpected kindness sets the story's plot in motion.

Hughie's generosity was not lost on the beggar, who was actually one of the richest men in Europe. Baron was so impressed by Hughie's generosity that he rewarded Hughie with ten thousand pounds.

6.7.2 APPEARANCE VS REALITY

The story plays with the concept of appearances. Hughie is a good-looking man but he is poor. The beggar is a wealthy man in disguise.

He was a strange rough fellow, with a freckled face and a red ragged beard.

Although Hughie was admittedly handsome and charming but not necessarily the smartest because he had failed in every business he tried and was jobless.

This theme questions the reliability of outward appearances and suggests that true value lies in character.

6.7.3 WEALTH

The plot of the story shows the importance of wealth in Victorian England. The title and the opening sentence draw attention to this point.

Unless one is wealthy there is no use in being a charming fellow. Romance is the privilege of the rich, not the profession of the unemployed. The poor should be practical and prosaic. It is better to have a permanent income than to be fascinating.

The Colonel asked Hughie to come to him with the proposal of marriage to his daughter when he had 10,000 pounds of his own, which shows how much importance was given to money.

6.7.4 CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

The story represents the social strata of Victorian society in a lighter tone. The protagonist, Hughie Erskine and his artist friend, Alan Trevor are representatives of the middle class that grew to constitute the largest section of the society.

During this time, socialism and redistribution of wealth was gathering momentum. The author has shown that the rich can voluntarily redistribute their wealth by encouraging moral values like kindness and generosity.

6.8 SYMBOL

Hughie’s last sovereign (a gold coin) symbolizes his capacity to feel empathy for people whose circumstances are worse than his own. Overcome with pity at the sight of the beggar in Alan’s studio (really the millionaire Baron Hausberg in costume), Hughie feels compelled to give the man some money. He feels around and finds only one sovereign, a coin of almost pure gold and worth a pound. Hughie knows that he can hardly afford to give the sovereign away, but he figures the beggar needs it more than he does. In this respect, the gold coin represents the magnanimous core of Hughie’s character, of which he gives freely and even recklessly. When he learns the beggar’s real identity, Hughie’s main regret is just that he might have insulted the wealthy Baron

with his sovereign. In fact, he has won the Baron's affection, and when the Baron repays him thousands of times over, Hughie is finally rewarded for his compassion and kindness.

6.9 NARRATION STYLE

The story is a third person narrative by an omnipresent narrator. The perspective of the narrator shifts to make the story interesting.

At times the narrator states his point of view, as "It is better to have a permanent income than to be fascinating". At others, the narrator appears to address his readers, as "Poor Hughie, Intellectually we must admit, he was not of much importance."

6.10 IRONY

The story has a situational irony as the outcome is the opposite or completely different from what was expected. In the story, Hughie thought of the model as a poor man and gave him the only sovereign he had. But the model turned out to be the richest man in Europe.

6.11 LET US SUM UP

The short tale "The Model Millionaire" was written by Irish novelist Oscar Wilde. In June 1887, it originally appeared in print in The World.

Anthology Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories included it when it was reprinted in 1891.

The narrative's protagonist is a young guy who is moved to compassion despite his financial struggles by seeing an elderly beggar acting as a model for his artist buddy. The young guy gives the beggar the most significant denomination coin he has in his pocket, even though he can hardly afford to do so. The young man's deed of charity had unanticipated advantages for him.

6.12 REFERENCE

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LESSON 7: R.L.STEVENSON- MARKHEIM

7.1 AUTHOR INTRODUCTION

Robert Louis Stevenson, one of the masters of the Victorian adventure story, was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, on November 13, 1850. He was often sick as a child, and respiratory troubles plagued him throughout his life. He enrolled at Edinburgh University at the age of seventeen with the intention to study engineering, but ended up studying law instead. He became a qualified lawyer but did not pursue the profession, choosing instead to become a full-time writer. As a young man, he traveled through Europe, leading a bohemian lifestyle and penning his first two books, both travel narratives. Stevenson felt constrained by the strict social norms of the Victorian era during which he lived, and many of his works demonstrate a sharp tension between upstanding duty and reckless abandon.

In 1876, he met Fanny Van de Grift Osbourne, and fell in love with her. At thirty-six, she was more than ten years older than he, and, furthermore, she had also been previously married and had two small children. Stevenson fell deeply in love with Osbourne. Two years later, he followed her as she returned to California to finalize her divorce, a journey he described in *The Amateur Emigrant* (1879). Stevenson and Osbourne married in California and spent their honeymoon at an abandoned silver mine.

Stevenson returned to London with his bride and wrote prolifically over the next decade, in spite of his poor health. Stevenson published many short stories and books over the early part of his life, but his first taste of real success came in 1883 with the publication of *Treasure Island,* a pirate-themed adventure novel originally published serially in *Young Folks* magazine. The magazine also published *Kidnapped* in 1886, the

year that also saw the publication of Stevenson's most famous novel, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.* It sold 40,000 copies in six months, and ensured Stevenson's fame as a writer.

By the late 1880s, Stevenson had become one of the leading lights of English literature. But even after garnering fame, he led a somewhat troubled life. He traveled often, seeking to find a climate more amenable to the tuberculosis that haunted his later days. In 1888, a doctor advised Stevenson to move to a warmer climate for his health. Stevenson and his family set sail for the South Seas, arriving in Samoa and taking up residence there in 1889. There, he died suddenly in 1894, at the age of forty-four.

7.2 WORK INTRODUCTION

"Markheim" is a short story by Robert Louis Stevenson, originally prepared for the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1884, but published in 1885 in *The Broken Shaft: Tales of Mid-Ocean* as part of *Unwin's Christmas Annual*. The story was later published in Stevenson's collection *The Merry Men and Other Tales and Fables* (1887).

7.3 SUMMARY

The story opens late one Christmas Day in an antique store, presumably in London during the mid-1880s. A man named Markheim has come even though the store is officially closed, and the rather shady dealer points out that whenever he comes to visit after hours, it is usually to privately sell a rare item, claiming it to be from a late uncle's collection he inherited. The dealer hints his suspicions that more likely Markheim stole these items, although it has not stopped him from purchasing them, usually for an amount less than what his client asked for. Markheim visibly flinches at the dealer's not-so-subtle insinuations, but claims that he has not come to sell anything this time, but rather to buy a Christmas present for a woman he will soon marry, implying she is well off. Though somewhat incredulous, the dealer suggests a mirror as a gift, but Markheim takes fright at his own reflection, claiming that no man wants to see what a mirror shows him. Markheim seems strangely reluctant to end the transaction, but when the dealer insists that his visitor must buy or leave, Markheim consents to review more goods.

However, when the dealer turns his back to select another item, Markheim pulls out a knife and stabs him to death.

Surrounded by mirrors and ominously ticking clocks, and with only a candle to light up the dark shop, Markheim spends some minutes recovering his nerve when he hears someone moving about upstairs, though he knows the dealer's maidservant has taken the day off and no one should be there. He reassures himself that the outer door is locked, searches the dealer's body for keys and then goes to the upper rooms where the dealer lived to look for money, which he intends to use to start a business. As he searches for the right key to open the dealer's safe, he hears footsteps on the stairs, and a man opens the door and asks, "Did you call me?"

Markheim believes the stranger is the Devil. Though he never identifies himself, the stranger is clearly supernatural; he says that he has watched Markheim his whole life. He tells Markheim that the servant is returning to the store early, so Markheim had best hurry or face the consequences. He also offers to show Markheim the right key to open the safe, although he predicts that Markheim's business will not be successful. Indeed, the stranger clearly knows that much of Markheim's life has been unsuccessful, consisting of gambling and petty theft. Instead of continuing to loot the house, Markheim tries to justify his life and conduct to the stranger, entering into a discussion of the nature of good and evil. The stranger refutes him on every point, and Markheim is at last obliged to admit that he has thrown his life away and turned to evil.

The servant returns, and as she knocks on the door the stranger advises Markheim that he can entice her in by telling her that her master is hurt, then kill her and have the whole night to ransack the house. Markheim retorts that while he has lost the love of good, he still hates evil. The face of the stranger undergoes a "wonderful and lovely change", full of "tender triumph", as he disappears. Markheim opens the door and tells the servant to call the police, for he has killed her master.

7.4 ANALYSIS

“Markheim,” a ghost story that deals with a disturbing problem of conscience, also contains a dialogue in its latter half. This dialogue, however, is a just continuation of the previous action. “Markheim” reinforces horror with moral investigation. Initial

atmosphere contribute directly to Stevenson's pursuit of his thematic concern, and the later debate with the "visitant" becomes an entirely fitting expression for Markheim's own madness.

An allegory of the awakening conscience, "Markheim" also has the limits of allegory, one of which is meaning. For readers to understand, or find meaning in, an allegory, characters (or actors) must be clearly identified. In "Markheim" this presents major difficulties. Not only is an exact identity (or role) for the visitant finally in doubt, but also the identity of the dealer is unclear. It can be said that he usually buys from Markheim, not sells to him, but exactly what the dealer buys or sells is a good question. Whatever, on this particular occasion (Christmas Day), Markheim will have to pay the dealer extra "for a kind of manner that I remark in you today very strongly."

Amid the "ticking of many clocks among the curious lumber" of the dealer's shop, a strange pantomime ensues. Markheim says he needs a present for a lady, and the dealer shows him a hand mirror. Markheim grows angry:

> "A glass," he said hoarsely, and then paused, and repeated it more clearly. "A glass? For Christmas? Surely not!"
> "And why not?" cried the dealer. "Why not a glass?"
> Markheim was looking upon him with an indefinable expression. "You ask me why not?" he said. "Why, look here—look at it—look at yourself! Do you like to see it? No! nor I—nor any man."

After damning the mirror as the "reminder of years, and sins, and follies—this handconscience," Markheim asks the dealer to tell something of himself, his secret life. The dealer puts Markheim off with a chuckle, but as he turns around for something more to show, Markheim lunges at him, stabbing him with a "long, skewerlike dagger." The dealer struggles "like a hen" and then dies. The murder seems completely gratuitous until Markheim remembers that he had come to rob the shop: "To have done the deed and yet not to reap the profit would be too abhorrent a failure."

Time, "which had closed for the victim," now becomes "instant and momenteous for the slayer." Like Villon, Markheim feels pursued by Death, haunted by "the dock, the prison, the gallows, and the black coffin." The blood at his feet begins "to find eloquent

voices." The dead dealer extracts his extra payment, becoming the enemy who would "lift up a cry that would ring over England, and fill the world with the echoes of pursuit." Talking to himself, Markheim denies that this evil murder indicates an equally evil nature, but his guilt troubles him. Not only pursued by Death, Markheim is pursued by Life as well. He sees his own face "repeated and repeated, as it were an army of spies"; his own eyes meet and detect him. Although alone, he feels the inexplicable consciousness of another presence:

Ay, surely; to every room and corner of the house his imagination followed it; and now it was a faceless thing, and yet had eyes to see with; and again it was a shadow of himself; and yet again beheld the image of the dead dealer, reinspired with cunning and hatred.

Eventually, Markheim must project an imaginary double, a doppelgänger or exteriorized voice with which to debate his troubles. Here, action passes from the stylized antique shop of the murdered to the frenzied mind of the murderer. The visitant, or double, is a product of this mind. Mad and guilty as Markheim appears to be, his double emerges as a calm-sounding sanity who will reason with him to commit further evil. Thus, the mysterious personification of drives buried deep within Markheim's psyche exteriorizes evil as an alter ego and allows Markheim the chance to act against it, against the evil in his own nature. Stevenson's sane, expository technique of debate erects a perfect foil for Markheim's true madness.

In the end, although Markheim thinks himself victorious over what seems the devil, it is actually this exteriorized aspect of Markheim's unknown self that conquers, tricking him into willing surrender and then revealing itself as a kind of redemptive angel:

The features of the visitor began to undergo a wonderful and lovely change; they brightened and softened with a tender triumph; and, even as they brightened, faded and dislimned. But Markheim did not pause to watch or understand the transformation.

Material and intention are artistically intertwined in "Markheim," but the moral ambiguities of Stevenson's theme remain complex, prompting various questions: is Markheim's martyrdom a victory over evil or merely a personal cessation from action? Set on Christmas Day, with its obvious reversal of that setting's usual significance, is

"Markheim" a portrayal of Christian resignation as a purely negative force, a justification for suicide, or as the only modern solution against evil? What is the true nature and identity of the visitant? Finally, can the visitant have an identity apart from Markheim's own? Even answers to these questions, like Markheim's final surrender, offer only partial consolation to the reader of this strange and complex story of psychological sickness.

7.5 THEMES

The plot of "Markheim" could be regarded as simply the story of a murder and its after effects on the murderer that lead him eventually to confess his crime. It is more than the story of a murder, however; it is, more significantly, the story of the process a man goes through to first face and then accept the evil side of his nature. The development of self-knowledge and the conflict between one's good and evil sides are the central themes in "Markheim." Markheim experiences an insight about his true self when he finally accepts that he has fallen morally. Before this point in the story, he has suppressed and denied his evil side.

Immediately after he murders the dealer, he appears not to feel remorse for his crime; he is more fearful of being caught and punished. Even after he has a flashback, as he looks at the murdered dealer's face, to the revulsion he felt while looking at a famous crime exhibit in his childhood, he claims not to feel penitent about his crime but rather feels only pity for the dealer.

Next, as he climbs the stairs to the dealer's house above the shop and reaches the top floor, Markheim continues to fear being caught as he wonders if the laws of nature will expose his crime. At this point, he still feels his crime is justified, believing God understands and accepts his excuses for committing murder.

In the dealer's drawing room, when he is in a calmer frame of mind, he hears children singing hymns nearby and recalls his churchgoing days in the past. When his mind is focused on a time when he was more religiously oriented, he hears the step on the stair. It is as if the memory of a time when he was a better and more moral person causes him to externalize his evil side and literally come face to face with it. The story

can be seen then as an inward journey from denial and repression to acceptance and ownership of his evil nature.

7.6 LET US SUM UP

Stevenson combines a moral drama with a gothic horror story. Despite the deliberate ambiguity, most critics view Markheim's visitor as some sort of "good" spirit, whose features suddenly "brightened and softened with a tender triumph" when Markheim decides to give himself up rather than choose to commit a second murder. Michael S. Rose of the New Oxford Review identifies him as Markheim's guardian angel**.**

7.7 REFERENCE

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LESSON 8: KATHERINE MANSFIELD- A CUP OF TEA

8.1 AUTHOR INTRODUCITON

Katherine Mansfield, original name Kathleen Mansfield (1888 –1923) was a New Zealand writer. When she moved to England she became a friend of D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and other prominent figures. Her short stories and poetry were very well received, they mostly focused on existentialism. She’s one of the most influential and important authors of the modernist movement and had much influence on the development of the short story as a form of literature. Her popular works include “Prelude” and “Bliss”.

8.2 WORK INTRODUCTION

In the present story, a poor girl approaches an affluent lady for money to buy a cup of tea on a winter afternoon. Appropriate to the situation, the author vividly describes the winter afternoon as follows: "Rain was falling and with the rain it seemed the dark came too, spinning down like ashes. There was a cold bitter taste in the air, and the new-lighted lamps looked sad... dimly they burned as if regretting something."

Isn't the description poetic? At the same time, it contrasts with the opulent atmosphere of Rosemary's house which is described as follows: "Rosemary drew the other into the hall. Warmth, softners, light, a sweet scent all those things so familiar to her she never even thought about them, she watched that other receive. It was fascinating". Further, the aforementioned description of opulence is in contrast with description of poverty (e.g. "... young girl, thick, dark, shadowy" the languid figure) to indicate that there is no meeting point between the affluent and the poor. Now we shall discuss the author's prose style in the following section.

8.3 SUMMARY

The protagonist Rosemary Fell is a very wealthy woman however, not “beautiful”. Rosemary has been married for two years to a very rich man, Phillips Fell. Rosemary lives a luxurious life, shopping at high-end shops and buying anything she desires. Once she visits an antique shop, the shopkeeper is very fond of her and seems to fancy her a lot. He shows her a small shiny velvet box that’s very beautiful. Rosemary is very pleased but knowing the price to be twenty-eight gunnies she decides not to buy it and asks the shopkeeper to save it for her.

Outside the shop, it’s raining and Rosemary is very upset that she can’t buy that box now. She’s approached by a timid looking girl who asks her for money, the price of a cup of tea. Rosemary thinks such things happen in books and sound incredible thus she decides to take the girl with her to her home. She wants to show the poor girl that rich people feel empathy for her kind. The girl is very shocked to receive such treatment, she’s afraid at first but agrees to go with her. Rosemary thinks about boasting about this in front of her friends.

At her house, Rosemary takes the girl up to her bedroom and makes her sit near the fire on a comfortable chair. She helps the girl take off her coat and hat but drops them on the floor. The poor girl cries that life’s too hard and she’s too tired to carry on, she wishes to end her life. Rosemary consoles her and orders tea. The girl is served tea along with some food. Rosemary lights up a cigarette while the girl eats. After the girl’s eaten some food she appears livelier. Rosemary starts to ask her about her life but she’s interrupted by her husband’s arrival. Phillip is astonished to see the girl in his

wife's room and he asks the girl's name, she says it is Smith. Phillip then asks Rosemary to join him in the library to talk in private.

Phillip inquires about the girl and Rosemary explains her philanthropic plans. Philip says that it's absurd to keep a stranger in the house like this but Rosemary is keen on her mission. Then Phillip mentions that the girl is very lovely and pretty. This makes Rosemary insecure. Rosemary leaves the library and picks up some money to give to the poor Miss Smith, she then asks her to leave. After Miss Smith leaves Rosemary dresses up nicely, makes her hair look nice and wears her pearls. She joins her husband back in the library and lies that Miss Smith insisted on leaving. She sits on his knees and asks him whether he likes her; he assures her that he likes her a lot. She then asks if she can buy the shiny velvet box from the antique store. Phillip agrees but that was not what she wanted to ask him. After a pause, she questions "Am I pretty?"

8.4 ANALYSIS

This story is narrated in the third person by an unnamed narrator, in a conversational manner. Appearances have a lot of importance in this story. Mansfield depicts the class difference and hypocrisy seen in New Zealand during the early 20th century. Rosemary appears to be a caring and kind woman but she has selfish intentions. She only helps the poor girl because she thinks it will improve her status among her friends. This reflects how the upper-class society only acts for their own benefit and they only help the poor to gain praise.

Rosemary lives a luxurious life unaware of the hardships the people like Miss Smith go through. Even if it was pretentious she tried to be kind and sympathetic towards Miss Smith however her insecurity and jealousy turned her selfish again. She becomes mean. When she kicked Miss Smith out, she could have at least given her some proper amount instead she gives her a mere three dollar bill. She just wanted to have an adventure; it was like a play to her but when it came to her own interests she decides to stop her little game.

Rosemary is jealous of the poor girl after her husband calls her lovely. Her insecurity stops her from offering her pretentious help; she makes the girl leave by giving her some money. At first, she picks up five pounds but then keeps two and only

gives three to the girl. She can help but she chooses to not help that girl. She's too concerned about her own feelings. The girl told her she might kill herself yet Rosemary showed no empathy. The author establishes that whatever the status, a woman of Rosemary's type is a woman after all, frail, and jealous, despite her desire to appear otherwise.

8.5 PROSE STYLE

For creating the required atmosphere, Katherine Mansfield uses an appropriate style. Take a look at the following conversation:

> 'I mean it,' she said, smiling. And she felt how simple and kind her smile was. 44 'Why won't you? Do come home with me now in my car and have tea' 'But I do', cried Rose-mary, 'I want you to. To please me. Come along'. '

To present the conversation between Rosemary and the poor girl, a colloquial style is used in the above passage. We are sure that you didn't face any difficulty in understanding the passage.

Now, read the following description of English weather:

> "She was outside on the step, gazing at the winter afternoon. Rain was falling and with the rain it seemed the dark came too, spinning down like ashes. There was a cold bitter taste in the air, and the new-lighted lamps looked sad. Sad were the lights in the house opposite".

It is difficult for most Indian readers to understand expressions like 'spinning like ashes' as we are not exposed to English weather.

Now, even a cursory glance at the following passage will enable you to know how adeptly Katherine Mansfield describes an enamel box with minute details:

> "An exquisite little enamel box with a glaze so fine it looked as though it had been backed in cream? On the lid a minute creature stood under a flowerly tree, and a more minute creature still had her arms

around his neck. Her hat, really no bigger than ageraniurn petal, hung from a branch; it had green ribbons".

The cultural background of the author is reflected in the choice of words and expressions. In the present short story, Katherine Mansfield used the following colloqunial expressions :

"duck of a boy"

"it was a great duck"

"spinning like ashes".

We are sure that you did not come across such expressions in the short stories of Indian writers like Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. Do you think that 'transferred '-epithet' is used in the following? "Transferred epithet" is a device in which an adjective-properly attached to one word is attached to another. Or is it "personification"?

"the new-lighted lamps looked sad"

"hidden under their hateful umbrellas"

8.6 THEMES

8.6.1 MATERIALISM

Rosemary is very materialistic and her intentions are centred on materialistic things. She desires the shiny velvet box a lot and after she fails to buy it she becomes so upset as if it was a big tragedy. She then helps Miss Smith to make herself look good but the moment her vanity is hurt she drops her idea of helping. This reflects how the rich lack emotions and empathy; they keep reaching towards materialistic goals. As a woman, Rosemary is inclined to make herself look beautiful in order to establish her worth. This is another materialistic attitude of the society that the author condemns. People force women to feel insecure about themselves, women are only valued for their beauty. Appearances are given more importance than personality and values.

8.6.2 CLASS DIFFERENCE

The disparity of classes was very evident in this story. Miss Smith has no money to buy her a meal, she desperately asks for money for a cup of tea. While there are rich people like Rosemary who waste money on flowers and shiny objects which they don't need. Despite having so much money they don't help others. While the wealthy people indulge in materialistic things the poor are exposed to hunger and suffering. Rosemary represents the mentality of the upper-class people. The major theme of this story is the class difference between Rosemary and Miss Smith. The upper-class people are materialistic and selfish. They have a lot of money and possessions yet they want more and go after insignificant expensive things. The velvet box symbolizes this materialistic attitude. On the other hand, the lower class people don't have enough to get ends meet. They lack the money to even afford basic needs like food and shelter. The cup of tea symbolizes their requirements.

8.6.3 APPEARANCE VERSUS REALITY

In the whole story, readers may find the appearance in contrast to reality. On the surface, the person seems different however his intentions are something else. In this way, Mansfield portrays hypocrisy in New Zealand's perturbed society. Rosemary on the surface strikes kind and caring by taking care of Miss. Smith.

However, the reality of her intentions is full of hypocrisy. She helps her not out of kindness or cares rather for her own interests. She thought by helping so would give her a chance of upgrading her status and boasting her action.

In a similar manner, Mansfield pinpoints her society in which upper classes were taking advantage of virtuous acts for their own benefits. They help the poor to gain praise and material objects.

8.6.4 JEALOUSY AND INSECURITY

Rosemary has made a prototype of jealousy and insecurity. At first, she appears kind and helps Miss. Smith. But in the end, when her husband, Philip praises Miss. Smith got jealous and insecure.

In order to get rid of Miss. Smith gives her money. Afterwards, she did some makeup and tried to attract the attention of her husband by her charming looks.

8.7 CHARACTER LIST

8.7.1 ROSEMARY

Rosemary is a materialistic and snobbish woman. She keeps chasing materialistic things and cares about appearances a lot. She's selfish for the most part and pretentious. She may have been selfish but we find that she's also venerable the same as everyone. She has her own insecurities. Her husband's attraction towards Miss Smith hurts her and compels her to become rude. At the end of the story she asks her husband "am I pretty?" this shows that she too wants validation. She wants someone to value her and recognize her for who she is.

8.7.2 PHILIPS FELL

The husband of Rosemary is in fact one of the richest persons of his society. He loves his wife devotedly and cares for her a lot. He calls Miss Smith pretty much to his wife's chagrin, just to make her send Miss Smith away as she refuses to do so when he asks her in the first place even though making his wife feel insecure about herself and her beauty.

8.7.3 MISS SMITH

She is a lean and thin poor girl of just the age of Rosemary. She can't even afford a single cup of tea and comes to ask Rosemary to pay her the price of a cup of tea. She is an odd person, frightened and confused. She is shocked when Rosemary asks her to have a cup of tea with her at her home. In Mr. Philips' point of view, Miss Smith is very attractive and pretty.

8.7.4 THE SHOPKEEPER

The owner of a beautiful antique ornaments shop which in fact was one of Rosemary's favorite shops. He would always be looking forward to having Rosemary at his shop and always saving a lovely piece of art for her, just like he had been saving the eye-catching blue velvet box. He is kind of an ingratiating character.

8.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TITLE

A Cup of Tea connotes the holier-than-thou nature of upper classes how they even would carry out virtuous acts for their own beneficial purpose. By making themselves hypocritically pious to upgrade their social status and gain praise from society. Their true intentions are not assisting them rather manipulating them. Rosemary did the same while helping Miss. Smith. Her intentions weren't to help her but to boast her act of kindness in society.

8.9 SETTING

The time frame of this story is set in the 1920s. However, the location shifts twice. Firstly, it takes place at the small antique shop on Curzon Street. Subsequently, it shifts to Fell's house.

8.10 SYMBOLISM

8.10.1 BOX

Box's price and its ornamentations emphasize extravagance and materialism. Rosemary when she saw this box get attracted to it. Though she has a desire to buy it, its price doesn't allow her. It represents how Rosemary instead of spending on useful things used to spend on worthless things. Also, it expresses her appeal for material gains.

8.10.2 CUP OF TEA

Cup of tea symbolizes the sanctimonious upper class and exploitation of the poor class at the hands of the upper class. This suggests to readers how even the act of philanthropy is fake and used for its own beneficial purpose. The way Rosemary did to Miss. Smith by helping her without true care and intimacy. All she thought was to boast that act in her social circle and gain praise.

8.10.3 HAT

The Hat is a symbol used to exhibit apathy and prejudice of the upper class against the poor. Rosemary at first tries to help Miss. Smith to doff her hat and coat. But afterwards she shows her apathy, instead of putting them in an appropriate place, she

leaves them on the floor. This depicts the outlook of the upper class and their way of treating them.

8.11 IMAGERY

Mansfield has used incredible imagery in the story. She tactfully portrays the weather according to the doleful mood of Rosemary

"a cold bitter taste in the air" as she couldn't buy an enamel box. Rain is showering but due to the dark it seems like ashes falling on the ground *"spinning down like ashes".* Also, the lights lit up in the rain *"looked sad"* and *"were regretting something".*

Similar to this, Mansfield exhibits Rosemary's hat that resembles a *"germanium petal"* in size and green ribbons that seem like leaves *"hung from a branch*".

The narrator also pictures the pathetic condition of the poor young girl and her skinny and weak features. The narrator says she is a *"frail creature"* having disheveled hairs, *"dark lips"* and "*light eyes"*

In the same way, readers may find Mansfield using color imagery to visualize Rosemary's bedroom and its beauty. The narrator says the room was furnished with glossy furniture along with *"gold cushions and the primrose and blue rugs"*

8.12 LITERARY DEVICES

8.12.1 PERSONIFICATION, METAPHORS, AND SIMILES

Readers may come across several personifications and similes in the story. The narrator says "*Her heart beats like a heavy bell".* This shows how Rosemary feels insecure and jealous of the poor girl, praised by her husband, Philip for charm looks. Similarly, Mansfield seems to personify weather with gloomy abstract such as *"cold bitter taste in the air*". This represents her gloomy mood as she couldn't buy the little enamel box.

Likewise, Mansfield also personified inanimate things with humanly attributes. For instance, the narrator says the lights of the houses *"looked sad*" and were *"regretting something"*

Moreover, one can also see how the narrator is using different metaphors for young girl i-e, "*little battered creature", "poor little thing", "thin figure", "new being, a light, frail creature with tangled hair" and "listless figure".* Mansfield used the aforementioned metaphors to highlight the miserable condition and outlook of Rosemary towards poor people.

In the same way, the narrator also shows poor young girl's features and actions with the help of metaphors and similes. The narrator says "*voice like a sigh, almost like a sob"* to emphasize her sorrows. Similarly, to depict the young girl as being skinny the narrator says *"bird-like shoulders*". Also, Mansfield applies metaphor to depict the action of shivering a young girl with a child by saying *"She seemed to stagger like a child".*

Further, the narrator used the metaphor of

"*a geranium petal"* to express the charm of Rosemary's hat. Also, the narrator describes the glowing delicacy of the box and metaphorized it *"as though it had been baked in cream".*

8.12.2 OXYMORON

Readers may also find Mansfield using oxymoron at one point in the story. Oxymoron appears in the dialogue of Philip when he advises Rosemary to take good care of Miss Smith. He says *"Be frightfully nice to her".* On one hand, it shows the concern of Philip towards the poor girl. On the other hand, it shows the dialect of Philip.

8.12.3 ALLUSION

Mansfield has alluded to *"Dostoevsky"* to mirror the hypocrisy behind helping the poor the way Rosemary did.

8.12.4 HYPERBOLE

Mansfield has exaggeratedly explained the wealth of Rosemary in the story. If Rosemary wants to go shopping she would prefer Paris unlike common people who go to Bond Street.

8.12.5 IRONY

Mansfield has allied irony on the philanthropy of upper classes. She rebukes their intentions to help others which is nothing but to show off and maintain a status in society. This gives them a point to brag on.

8.12.6 TONE AND GENRE

The story is first told in a cheerful and enthusiastic tone. However, in the end, tone changes into disgruntled and bitter. *A Cup of Tea* is a short story written in realistic fiction.

8.13 LET US SUM UP

A Cup of Tea by Katherine Mansfield was first published in the “Story-Teller” in May 1922. It later appeared in “The Doves’ Nest and Other Stories” in 1923. The protagonist is a snobbish wealthy woman who only lends a helping hand to a poor girl because she thinks it’ll make her look good. The author portrays a clear image of class difference and the attitudes of people of different classes. Themes of materialism and class difference are explored in this story.

8.14 REFERENCE

https://www.aplustopper.com/a-cup-of-tea-summary/

https://litbug.com/a-cup-of-tea-summary-and-analysis/

https://litpriest.com/short-stories/a-cup-of-tea-summary-themes-analysis/

LESSON 9: W SOMERSET MAUGHAM- THE VERGER

9.1 AUTHOR INTRODUCTION

William Somerset Maugham, a British author of novels, short stories, and plays, was honoured as the highest-paid author of the 1930s. Before he became a well-known writer, he had an unusual career that influenced a lot of his work. By 1914, Maugham had written ten books and ten plays. British and American critics first rejected "Of Human Bondage," a semi-autobiographical book that is today regarded as one of his finest works, as an excessively sentimental romance story.

9.2 WORK INTRODUCTION

"*The Verger*" is a short story written by W. Somerset Maugham, first published in 1930. Maugham was a British playwright and author, known for his keen observations of human behavior. "*The Verger"* is one of his many short stories that reflects his wit and insight into the complexities of human life.

"*The Verger"* is a compelling story that explores themes such as societal expectations, success, and the value of traditional education.

Maugham uses the character of Foreman to comment on the importance of practical skills and the arbitrary nature of societal norms. The story is concise but thought-provoking, making it an excellent

9.3 SUMMARY

The Verger, a short story by Maugham, is the story of the unassuming Albert Edward Foreman. He served as a verger at St. Peter's Church in Neville Square, doing his responsibilities with enthusiasm and devotion for fourteen years. The new vicar's entry inside the church interrupts his normal duties. He wants everything to be flawless. As soon as he learns that the foreman is illiterate, he acts immediately. The priest believes that characteristics like reading and writing ability speak well of St. Peter's.

Despite having an excellent track record, the foreman still loses his job. The foreman will have three months of grace from the vicar to learn how to read and write. However, he declines the offer, claiming that he is too young to learn.

Because the foreman is illiterate, the parish has chosen to terminate his employment, the vicar says. Foreman had never expected to suffer such a severe blow as a result of the priest's choice. He had believed that his position as a verger was permanent when he was appointed sixteen years earlier. However, he suddenly loses his job after a lengthy sixteen-year of career. By accepting any household duties outside the heavenly church service, he doesn't want to humiliate himself.

Foreman is really unhappy and distressed when he exits the church. He makes a wrong decision and travels away from his house. He moves slowly along the lengthy road, carefully considering what he should do next. He has a pitiful sum of money, but it is not enough to support his family's needs without working. He doesn't smoke, but he likes a cigarette when he's upset or worn out. He wants to smoke, which would make him feel better. In the lengthy street, he is unable to locate a tobacco store.

He thinks that it sounds odd. He believes that a tobacco business would be successful in such a location. He follows through with his plan on the following day. He launches his tobacco company by renting a suitable store. All is good. After turning a profit, he opens ten branches around London in ten years. He develops into a successful businessman, and his bank account reaches £30,000.

The bank manager gives him advice one day to put his money in certain secure assets. Albert claims he doesn't want to take any chances and prefers to keep his money secure in the bank. In addition, he has no idea how or in what securities he may invest. The manager responds that all he needs to do is a sign and that he is there to care for his money. Albert has gained the ability to sign since starting the company. How does he know where he is investing? He queries the manager. The manager claims that he is able to read the paper and then sign it. Albert recognizes his lack of literacy.

His confession surprised the management. Albert has accumulated an enormous amount of money despite not being able to read or write. What he may have

accomplished if he had been educated and read. Albert replies lightly, though, that if he knew how to read and write, his only job would be as a verger at St. Peter's Neville Square.

9.4 CHARACTER LIST

9.4.1 VERGER

The eponymous verger in Maugham's short story is illiterate, which causes him to lose his job in the church. Despite his abrupt dismissal, there's no sense that not being able to read and write ever held him back in his work, which would seem to imply that he has remarkable characteristics that more than make up for his illiteracy.

Those characteristics—tenacity, hard work, and determination—are put to good use in Mr. Foreman's new business career. Sensing a niche in the market, he opens up a tobacconist's shop. Before long, he's opened nine more, all of which make him a considerable sum of money.

Though it may be difficult to envisage, Foreman has achieved business success despite still being unable to read and write. This would suggest, at the very least, a certain resourcefulness on his part, in addition to all the other characteristics that have made him what he is.

Despite his enormous success, Foreman remains humble and grounded. This would explain why he's kept his money in a simple bank account instead of investing it for higher returns. Unlike a lot of businessmen, he doesn't seek world domination; he just wants to secure a decent standard of living for himself and his wife.

9.5 LET US SUM UP

The story revolves around, a verger (caretaker) at a church in London. Despite his lack of formal education, Foreman is a dedicated and hardworking individual. His life takes an unexpected turn when the new vicar discovers that Foreman cannot read or write. This discovery leads to a significant change in Foreman’s life and challenges the conventional notions of success and happiness.

9.6 REFERENCE

https://xpressenglish.com/our-stories/the-verger/analysis/

Self Assessment Questions :

Two Marks

3.1

What commentary does "The Model Millionaire" offer on the social class system of Victorian England?

"The Model Millionaire" critiques the social class system of Victorian England by highlighting the superficiality and materialism of the upper class. The story also explores the theme of social mobility, suggesting that class is not fixed and that individuals can transcend their circumstances.

Construct a moral lesson from the story “The Model Millionaire”.

The story illustrates the importance of generosity and kindness over wealth. Hughie’s selfless act of giving to someone he thought was poor teaches the value of compassion and the unpredictable rewards it can bring. Wilde emphasizes that true wealth lies in character, not in material riches.

3.2

Discuss the character of Markheim in the story embody the dual nature of human beings.

Markheim's character represents the dual nature of human beings, as he is torn between his good and evil impulses. Through Markheim's inner conflict, Stevenson explores the complexity of human nature and the struggle between light and darkness.

Examine the role of conscience in Markheim.

The story deeply examines Markheim's internal struggle with guilt and conscience after committing a murder. His interaction with the mysterious stranger forces him to confront his moral decay and the possibility of redemption. Stevenson portrays conscience as an unavoidable force that compels self-reflection and change.

3.3

Extend the character of Rosemary Fell in "A Cup of Tea" embody the constraints placed on women during the early 20th century.

Rosemary Fell's character represents the constraints placed on women during the early 20th century, as she is trapped in a loveless marriage and feels suffocated by societal expectations. Through Rosemary's character, Mansfield explores the limitations placed on women's lives and the desire for freedom and autonomy.

Illustrate the theme of class and social status on "A Cup of Tea".

"A Cup of Tea" critiques the theme of class and social status by highlighting the superficiality and materialism of the wealthy elite. The story also explores the tension between old money and new riches, suggesting that social status is not fixed and can be transcended.

Compare Rosemary's character before and after her interaction with the poor girl.

Before meeting the poor girl, Rosemary is confident and feels generous in her wealth, seeing herself as magnanimous. However, after her husband mentions the girl's beauty, Rosemary's insecurity and jealousy surface, highlighting her shallow nature. Mansfield uses this shift to critique the fragility of social pretense.

3.4

Illustrate the character of Albert Edward Foreman in "The Verger" embody the theme of social mobility and class transition.

Albert Edward Foreman's character represents the theme of social mobility and class transition, as he rises from a lowly position to become a respected member of society. Through Foreman's character, Maugham explores the possibilities of social change and the impact of circumstance on individual lives.

What symbolism can be inferred from the verger's role in the story.?

The verger's role in the story serves as a symbol of tradition and continuity, highlighting the importance of preserving social norms and institutions. The verger's position also represents the tension between old and new, as he struggles to adapt to changing circumstances.

Identify the significance of the verger's lack of literacy.
The verger’s illiteracy symbolizes both his initial limitations and his ability to succeed despite societal expectations. Maugham shows how formal education is not always necessary for success, as the verger’s practical skills and entrepreneurial spirit lead him to unexpected prosperity.

Five Marks

1. Justify Wilde use the character of Hughie Erskine to explore the tension between aestheticism and social responsibility.
2. Analyze the symbolism of the portrait in "The Model Millionaire". What does it reveal about the themes of the story.
3. How does Stevenson use the setting of the antique shop to create a sense of atmosphere and foreboding?

4. Scrutinize the character of Markheim's inner conflict. What does it reveal about the human condition.
5. Elucidate how Mansfield use the character of Rosemary Fell to explore the constraints placed on women during the early 20th century.
6. Examine the theme of class and social status in "A Cup of Tea". How does Mansfield critique the social norms of her time.
7. Investigate the symbolism of the verger's role in the story. What does it reveal about tradition and continuity.

Eights Marks

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of Wilde's use of satire in "The Model Millionaire". How does he use humor and irony to critique the social class system of Victorian England?
2. Discuss the psychological insights offered by "Markheim". How does the story illuminate the human condition, particularly in relation to guilt, redemption, and personal responsibility?
3. Imagine an alternative ending to "A Cup of Tea" where Rosemary Fell chooses to defy societal expectations and pursue her own desires. How would this change the themes and character development in the story?
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of Maugham's use of satire in "The Verger". How does he use humor and irony to critique the social class system and religious institutions?

Unit IV

Commonwealth Literature

UNIT IV COMMONWEALTH LITERATURE

LESSON 10: ALICE MUNRO- BOYS AND GIRLS

10.1 AUTHOR INTRODUCTION

Alice Ann Munro (193 –2024) was a Canadian short story writer who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013. Her work is said to have revolutionized the architecture of the short story, especially in its tendency to move forward and backward in time, and with integrated short fiction cycles.

Munro's fiction is most often set in her native Huron County in southwestern Ontario. Her stories explore human complexities in an uncomplicated prose style. Her writing established her reputation as a great author in the vein of Anton Chekhov.

Munro received the Man Booker International Prize in 2009 for her lifetime contribution. She was also a three-time winner of Canada's Governor General's Award for Fiction, and received the Writers' Trust of Canada's 1996 Marian Engel Award and the 2004 Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize for Runaway.

10.2 WORK INTRODUCTION

In Alice Munro’s Boys and Girls, we have an engaging story that deals with the themes of innocence, gender roles and fear. “Boys and Girls” by Alice Munro was first published as a single story in 1964 and was later collected in Munro’s 1968 collection, Dance of the Happy Shades. An unnamed girl narrates the story. The protagonist of the story is a young woman searching for her own identity. She wants to work outside with her father, but tradition and expectations force her to grow up and become a girl who works inside the house with her mother, rather than the free and independent woman she dreams of becoming. The girl is confronted with the expectations and boundaries that have been placed on her throughout the story. She tries to fight them, and Flora, a horse, provides her with some encouragement and inspiration.

10.3 SUMMARY

The story is set in a rural Canadian home, and the narrator, a soon-to-be eleven year-old girl, describes her father's work as a fox farmer with care. The work is seasonal and the narrator begins removing fox pelts from the small, mean, and rat-like bodies in the basement a few weeks before Christmas. The narrator mentions that her mother despised the whole pelting operation. Henry Bailey, the family's hired man, assists the narrator's father and teases the children. The narrator and her younger brother, Laird, were afraid of the dark. They sleep upstairs in an unfinished room where bats and skeletons, she imagines, live. To keep them safe, the children have rules that specify which parts of the room they can enter with or without the lights turned on. Both children fall asleep singing to themselves. When Laird falls asleep, the narrator begins telling herself stories, which she continues to tell herself night after night. These stories are about her when she was a little older, and they took place in a world that was recognizable as hers and offers opportunities for courage, boldness, and self-sacrifice.

The foxes, like the narrator and her brother, live in a small space. Their pen is encircled by a high guard fence, reminiscent of a mediaeval town, with a padlocked gate at night. The narrator, her father, and Laird give each of the foxes a name. Every day, the narrator's job is to bring water to the foxes. Although everyone was familiar with the foxes, naming them did not turn them into pets or anything similar. When the narrator assists her father with the foxes, she notices that he is quiet, in contrast to her mother, who used to tell her stories. To a visitor, he refers to her as a hired hand, which she takes as a compliment. The narrator overhears her father and mother talking about her one night. They meet in front of the barn, which is unusual because her mother didn't leave the house very often. The narrator overhears her mother console her father, telling him to wait until Laird is a little bigger so he can get some real help. Her mother longs to have help in the house; at the moment, she says how it's not like she had a girl in the family at all.

Her mother loves her but is also her adversary. She recognizes a scheme to persuade her to spend more time at home, though she admits that it never occurred to her that her mother might be lonely or jealous. Things change the winter that the narrator is 11 years old. When her grandmother comes to visit, she starts to hear a lot more of the same theme that her mother had sounded when she was talking in front of

the barn. The foxes in the family eat horsemeat from retired local horses. The narrator's family has more horses to buy as more farmers buy tractors at the end of WWII. That year, they buy two, Mack and Flora, who will be shot in the park by the narrator's father and Henry Bailey. The narrator and Laird sneak into the barn to watch from the loft, where they witness their father and Henry shooting the horse. After their father shoots the horse, the narrator notices that Laird has drawn a long, groaning breath of surprise, and she rushes him out of the barn.

As Laird regains his youth and obedience, she recalls a time when she put him in danger on the barn's top beam years ago. She makes Laird promise not to tell anyone that she took him to see the horse slaughter, and then she takes him to see a movie in town. She doesn't think about watching it two weeks later when she knows they're going to kill Flora. In the way she thinks about her father, she is a little embarrassed and has developed a new wariness, a sense of holding back. Flora, on the other hand, breaks free and runs through the backyard when the men take her out of the barn. Flora is running to the gate when the narrator's father and Henry Bailey shout at her to hurry up and close the gate. Rather than closing the gate, she swings it open as wide as she can. The men, including Laird, pass through the gate to apprehend Flora, and the narrator closes it. She returns to her mother, knowing that they would apprehend Flora but also fearful of the consequences, as she had never disobeyed her father before. The narrator realizes she is siding with Flora.

The narrator reflects on her and Laird's nighttime routine as she sits upstairs on her bed in the room she had begun to decorate. They stopped singing in the evenings. Something different was happening in her nighttime stories, and instead of rescuing others, she was being rescued. When the men return, Laird brags about shooting old Flora and shows a streak of blood on his arm to prove it. During a meal, Laird informs the group that Flora's escape was due to the narrator's fault. The narrator begins to cry, much to her father's surprise and embarrassment. When he asks why, she doesn't have an answer, so he dismisses her with the phrase "she's only a girl." Perhaps it was true, the narrator muses at the end of the story.

10.4 ANALYSIS

In Alice Munro's short story "Boys and Girls," the protagonist is a young girl growing up in Canada in the mid-twentieth century. She lives on their farm with her family, which consists of her mother, father, and younger brother Laird, and her life is marked by gender roles. Munro doesn't give the girl a name, and as a result, the protagonist is portrayed as a person without a name. She has no sense of self-identity or power. The existence of a name for the girl's younger brother indicates that he is more important simply because he is a boy and that he is the one in charge. The protagonist of the story is torn between her "girl" life in the kitchen with her mother and her "boy" life outside the house with her father helping out on the farm.

The story's conflicts are the differing expectations of a girl and a boy, as well as the protagonist's feelings about and struggle to find her own identity. The girl's belief that she can contribute significantly to her father's work is shattered when she discovers that she can't. She realizes what society thinks of her and what it expects of her. The protagonist wishes to collaborate with her father on a project. She enjoys the attention she receives from her father while working on their fox farm. When a salesman arrives at the farm while the protagonist is raking the freshly cut grass, her father introduces her as his "new hired man," to which the salesman replies,

"I thought it was only a girl."

If it hadn't been for the girl, the situation would have been very different. When the protagonist's mother expresses her desire for the girl, she says this to her father.

"Wait till Laird gets a little bigger, then you'll have a real help."

The protagonist of the story tries hard to find her own identity and does not want to be labelled as "just a girl." The protagonist views her mother as a person who cannot be trusted. She believes her mother is plotting "…to get me to stay in the house more, although she knew that I hated it."

The protagonist considers her mother's work to be less important than her father's. She considers the inside work to be "endless, dreary, and peculiarly depressing," while the outside work is "ritually significant"

The protagonist aspires to be more than a housewife; she wants to be someone who makes a difference. This is clear when the protagonist discusses the stories she tells herself every night before going to bed. The stories are full of heroic moments, and the protagonist is the main character. The protagonist aspires to be this heroic woman in the future, but it is not her. Her family wants her to be the stereotypical girl, but she refuses. The protagonist's search for her own identity is also reflected in her identification with Flora, the horse. Flora is set to be slaughtered as fox meat, but the horse, being powerful, rebellious, and strong, manages to flee her father. The protagonist is the only one close enough to the gate, but she does not close it when the female horse gallops toward her. The protagonist's feelings about the horse's disappearance are similar to her feelings about herself. She understands that there will be no wild country for her, just as Flora will not have any freedom. She is aware that

"A girl was not, as I had supposed, simply what I was; it was what I had to become."

10.5 THEMES

Themes of innocence, gender roles, and fear are all in this story. The story addresses the protagonist's feelings about and struggles to find her own identity, as well as the varying expectations of a girl and a boy. When the girl learns that she is unable to contribute significantly to her father's work, her hopes are dashed. She understands how society views her and what it expects of her. The narrator's fear of her father is exemplified in the incident where she is running to the gate and her father and Henry Bailey shout at her to hurry up and close the gate. She swings the gate open as wide as she can rather than closing it. She returns to her mother, knowing that they will apprehend Flora, but also fearful of the repercussions because she had never disobeyed her father before. Her innocence and goals are thwarted by society's expectations.

10.6 CHARACTER LIST

10.6.1 NARRATOR

The story revolves around a young girl who is about to turn eleven years old. We see the character development of this girl as she learns the difference between boys and girls and what society expects of her throughout the story. Her dreams are dashed, and the story concludes with a stereotypical depiction of how she may end up living her life.

10.6.2 LARID

He is the younger brother of the narrator. We see him as an obedient little boy at first, but he soon grows up to resemble more like her father.

Father- The narrator's father is a hard worker who wants his son to grow up quickly so he can assist him with his work. Near the end of the story, he dismisses her daughter by referring to her as "just a girl."

10.6.3 MOTHER

The mother of the narrator is a typical housewife who adheres to gender roles and wishes for her daughter to follow in her footsteps. She makes every effort to make her stay at home and assist with household chores.

10.6.4 HENRY BAILEY

The narrator's father is helped by Henry, a farmhand. He is a pleasant person, and the family shows their appreciation by inviting him to dinner and spending time with him.

10.7 LET US SUM UP

In a rural Canadian home, an 11-year-old girl describes her father's seasonal job as a fox farmer. The narrator and her brother, Laird, are afraid of the dark and have rules to keep them safe. The narrator tells herself stories about her childhood, which

offer opportunities for courage, boldness, and self-sacrifice. The foxes live in a small space with a high guard fence and padlocked gate at night.

The narrator's father is quiet, unlike her mother, who used to tell her stories. Her mother consoles her father, telling him to wait until Laird is a little bigger for help. Her mother recognizes a scheme to persuade her to spend more time at home. The narrator's family buys two horses, Mack and Flora, to be shot in the park by her father and Henry Bailey. The narrator and Laird sneak into the barn to watch, and after their father shoots the horse, Laird draws a long breath of surprise, and she rushes him out of the barn.

Laird, a young man, recalls a past incident where she put him in danger and took him to see a movie. Two weeks later, Flora breaks free and runs through the barn, being apprehended by the men. The narrator, fearing the consequences, decides to support Flora. They stop singing in the evenings and Laird brags about shooting Flora. During a meal, Laird reveals Flora's escape was due to the narrator's fault, causing her father to be surprised and embarrassed. The narrator reflects on the situation and wonders if it was true.

10.8 REFERENCE

https://www.cram.com/essay/Approach-To-Womanhood-In-Boys-And-Girls/FJUJX3FCPRR#google vignette

LESSON 11: CHINUA ACHEBE: MARRIAGE IS A PRIVATE AFFAIR

11.1 AUTHOR INTRODUCTION

Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) was a Nigerian novelist and poet, considered one of the most important writers of the twentieth century. He is best known for his debut novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), which is the most widely read novel in modern African literature.

Achebe was raised by evangelical Christian parents in the village Ogidi in Igboland, Nigeria. He received an early education in English, but grew up surrounded by a complex fusion of Igbo traditions and colonial legacy. Achebe studied at the University College, a British-style university, originally intending to study medicine, but eventually changing his major to English, history, and theology.

After graduating, Achebe worked for the Nigerian Broadcasting Company in Lagos and later studied at the British Broadcasting Corporation staff school in London. During this time, Achebe was developing work as a writer. Having been taught that Igbo values and culture were inferior to those of Europeans, and finding in Western literature only caricatured stereotypes of Africans, he wanted to conceive of an African literature that would present African characters and society in their full richness and complexity. Starting in the 1950s, he helped to found a new Nigerian literary movement that drew on the oral traditions of Nigeria's indigenous tribes. Although Achebe wrote in English, he attempted to incorporate Igbo vocabulary and narratives. Many of his novels dealt with the social and political problems facing his country, including the difficulties of its postcolonial legacy.

Achebe last lived in the United States, where he held a teaching position at Bard College until 2009, when he joined Brown University as a professor of African Studies. He continued writing throughout his life, producing both fiction and non-fiction, and winning awards such as the Man Booker International Prize in 2007. Achebe died in 2013 of an undisclosed illness while living and teaching in Boston, Massachusetts.

11.2 WORK INTRODUCTION

Written in 1952, Chinua Achebe's short story "Marriage is a Private Affair" is about a Nigerian father who rejects his son's decision to marry for love instead of accepting an arranged marriage. While arranged marriages are traditional in the father's Ibo village, the son chooses to marry a non-Ibo woman he meets while living in the city of Lagos. The son holds out hope that his father, Okeke, will learn to accept his decision. However, years pass with Okeke obstinately refusing to have anything to do with his son and daughter-in-law. It is only once Okeke learns he has two grandsons who want to visit him that he realizes the error of having hardened his heart against his family. After his revelation, the old man goes to sleep full of fear that he will die before he has the opportunity to make it up with his grandsons.

Exploring the conflicts between tradition and modernity, "Marriage is a Private Affair" uses the example of Okeke's obstinate insistence on arranged marriage to show the divide between the values of those living in cities and those living in villages in mid-century Nigeria. While Nene and Nnaemeka represent a youthful embrace of cosmopolitan ideals that prize individuality and love, Okeke represents a stubborn attachment to tradition. Ultimately, Okeke's refusal to adapt to the changing attitudes that arise alongside modernity leaves him isolated and embittered, and perhaps unable to pass on any of his culture and wisdom to his grandchildren.

Written less than a decade before Nigeria declared independence from Britain, "Marriage is a Private Affair" illustrates some of the cultural, political, and ethnic tensions that characterized Nigeria as it sought to establish its post-colonial national identity. The clash between Nnaemeka's newfound identity in Lagos and his Ibo roots speaks to the animosity between the Ibo people and northern Nigeria in the mid-twentieth century, a conflict that led to the Nigerian Civil War of the late 1960s, which saw the Ibo attempt to establish the independent secessionist state of Biafra.

11.3 SUMMARY

“Marriage is a Private Affair,” begins with Nene asking Nnaemeka if he has told his father, Okeke, about their big news. Though Nnaemeka thinks it would be better to

have the conversation with his father in six weeks when he goes to visit his village, Nene encourages him to write to Okeke and tell him sooner. She is sure that Okeke will be happy—who wouldn't be delighted that their son is getting married?—but Nnaemeka has to remind her that things are more complicated because the rural community that he is from is much different from Lagos, the city where Nene has lived all her life. He explains that in his community, it is customary for a father to choose a spouse for his children, and that said spouse must be Ibo. Although this is difficult for Nene to grasp, she realizes for the first time that Okeke might be displeased by their decision to get married. She nevertheless remains positive that Okeke will forgive Nnaemeka and subsequently continues to encourage him to send a letter to his father. Before returning to his place, Nnaemeka is able to finally convince Nene that it will be better for him to tell his father in person.

Later, Nnaemeka thinks about the letter his father sent him recently and smiles. In the letter, Okeke details the merits of a woman named Ugoye, particularly her "Christian upbringing," and communicates his desire to begin marriage negotiations between Nnaemeka and Ugoye in December.

During the second night of Nnaemeka's visit to his village, he asks his father for forgiveness before refusing to marry Ugoye, claiming that he doesn't love her. Okeke is shocked by Nnaemeka's refusal and is surprised that his son thinks he has to love Ugoye to marry her. Although Okeke tries to change his son's mind, Nnaemeka won't budge. Instead, Nnaemeka tells Okeke more about Nene, particularly her Christian faith and her job as a teacher. This makes Okeke even more furious, as he does not believe Christian women should teach, but his anger reaches its height when he realizes that Nene is not Ibo. Nnaemeka remains steadfast, however, and insists that Nene will be his future wife. Okeke walks away from the conversation and refuses to eat dinner that night.

The next day, Okeke again tries to convince his son to change course, but is unsuccessful, leading him to characterize his son's decision as "Satan's work." Nnaemeka, however, continues to hope that Okeke will change his mind, though Okeke promises that he will never accept or even meet Nene.

The rest of the village takes Okeke's side and share in his disappointment that Nnaemeka has chosen to marry "a woman who spoke a different tongue." Some take Nnaemeka's behavior as a sign of the "beginning of the end." One person in the village, Madubogwu, eventually suggests that Okeke consult a native doctor and get medicine to cure his son. Okeke refuses, citing Ms. Ochuba's mistakes as the reason he will not consult a native doctor to help his son "kill himself."

Six months pass and Okeke still has not come around. He even sends back the wedding picture Nnaemeka and Nene sent to him, with Nene cut out of the picture, with a letter describing how little interest he has in the couple. Nnaemeka consoles Nene after they read the letter. Eight more years pass and Okeke still refuses to see his son or have him in his house.

Nene also faces hardship within the Ibo community in Lagos, but the community eventually comes around accepts her. News of Nene and Nnaemeka's happy marriage travel to Okeke's village, but Okeke remains aloof. He uses his energy to push his son out of his mind, almost killing himself in the process.

One day, however, Okeke receives a letter from Nene. In the letter, Nene reveals that she and Nnaemeka have two sons, and explains that the boys would like to know their grandfather. For the first time since shunning Nnaemeka, Okeke feels overcome with guilt. Though he tries to fight it and attempts to stuff down his feelings, the raging storm outside pushes him to think about the consequences of his actions, his estrangement from his son and grandsons, and what it will mean for his family. He is unable to sleep peacefully that night because of his fear that he will never atone for his behavior.

11.4 ANALYSIS

The opening conversation between Nene and Nnaemeka introduces the central conflict of "Marriage is a Private Affair": Nnaemeka's father will not approve of Nene and Nnaemeka's engagement because Nnaemeka's father believes in the tradition of arranged marriage and Nene is not of the Ibo ethnicity.

During the conversation, Nene is surprised to learn that Nnaemeka's father Okeke is so attached to ideas so out-dated as arranged marriage and marrying within one's "tribe." The narrator comments that Nene's naivety results from having lived in the "cosmopolitan atmosphere" of Lagos, where she mixes with people from more diverse backgrounds than one encounters in rural Nigerian villages. She has always understood Ibo people to be "kindly disposed" toward others, but Nnaemeka explains that "marriage is a different matter," foreshadowing the conflict between father and son to come. But Nnaemeka assures Nene that his father will come around and learn to accept their decision to marry for love. By introducing the tensions between arranged marriage and marrying for love, between tradition and modernity, and between life in cities versus life in villages, Achebe establishes the story's major themes.

After leaving Nene's, Nnaemeka reflects on his predicament, knowing that it will be especially difficult to break the news of his engagement now that his father has found a woman for Nnaemeka to marry. In this instance of dramatic irony, in which the reader knows more than Nene about the true depth of the issue, the narrator reveals how Nnaemeka is torn between his allegiances to his fiancée and to his father.

While it is clear that Nnaemeka loves Nene enough to risk upsetting his father, it is also evident that Nnaemeka is reluctant to tell her the full truth of his family's customs, waiting until after they are engaged to explain how important arranged marriage is as a custom. Nnaemeka's duplicity contributes to the themes of tradition vs. modernity and city vs. village: Concealing key information from both Nene and his father, Nnaemeka is divided between the Ibo identity of his village origin and the new identity he has developed in the modern city.

Nnaemeka's dual allegiance is tested when he returns to his father's village to break the news that he cannot marry Ugoye, a brutish woman he remembers from childhood and who he knows to be unsuitable, despite what his father may believe. Nnaemeka waits to tell his father until they are under the cassia tree where Okeke retreats to read his Bible in peace. Presumably Nnaemeka chooses the location because he knows it is where Okeke, a man prone to losing his temper, is most likely to be calm as he receives news of his son's disobedience.

In the second section of the story, Achebe draws out the tensions between tradition and modernity, and between arranged marriage and love. Having traveled to his home village to tell his father that he can't marry Ugoye, the woman his father has arranged for him to marry, Nnaemeka tries to reason that he can't marry Ugoye because he does not love her. Okeke's reply—"Nobody said you did. Why should you?"—is comically dismissive. Nnaemeka says, "Marriage today is different," beginning to explain that the contemporary idea around marriage Nnaemeka has absorbed prize love over everything. But Okeke is too steeped in his ways, too attached to the ways of the village that he has always known, and so insists upon the primacy of arranged marriage over marrying for love.

Realizing that his father is too obstinate to be convinced by his line of argument, Nnaemeka moves away from abstract reasoning to undeniable facts, revealing that he is already engaged to Nene. The news confounds Okeke, as Nnaemeka expected it would. Okeke rejects the idea that his son is engaged on the grounds that love means nothing when looking for a partner, that the Bible says women should be silent and therefore not allowed to teach, and because Nene is from Calabar, meaning she is not an Ibo.

Okeke is clearly angry, but the explosion of scorn Nnaemeka anticipates does not come. Instead, Okeke uncharacteristically goes quiet and retires to his bedroom for the night. This instance of situational irony suggests that Nnaemeka has underestimated his father's attachment to tradition. While Nnaemeka expected his father would be angry with him, he did not expect his father would recede emotionally. In this way, Nnaemeka seriously underestimates his father's obstinacy—the quality of being unwaveringly stubborn.

After Okeke vows never to meet Nene, Nnaemeka travels back to Lagos. However, the narrative point of view stays with Okeke in the village, where he prays that the engagement will not proceed. News of Okeke's predicament spreads as locals commiserate with him. One man suggests that Nnaemeka's betrayal portends the beginning of the end for them while another alludes to the Christian Bible, citing the Lord's prediction that "Sons shall rise against their Fathers."

The unique mix of traditional Ibo culture and the adoption of Christianity is evident in how the conversation easily moves from talk of the Bible to talk of hiring a native doctor to prepare an herbal medicine for Nnaemeka. Some of the villagers recommend *Amalile*, the same medicine women use to keep their cheating husbands faithful. Okeke, despite his stubborn adherence to certain traditions, is considered progressive within the village, and so dismisses *Amalile* as superstition. Furthermore, he cites what happened when a local woman named Mrs. Ochuba tested her herbalist's medicine by putting it in the herbalist's food, a decision that resulted in the herbalist's death. With this discussion of the merits of traditional herbal medicine, Achebe shows how even among the villagers there is tension between adherence to tradition and the embrace of modernity.

Toward the end of the story, the narrative point of view briefly returns to Lagos, where Nnaemeka and Nene have received a letter from Okeke. In the letter, Okeke makes his obstinacy clear by explaining how he cut up the wedding photograph they sent him. The mutilated photo, symbolic of Okeke's obstinate refusal to recognize the validity of their marriage and his continued intention to have "nothing to do with" Nene, causes Nene to weep. Nnaemeka reassures her that his father will have a change of heart, but Nnaemeka continues to underestimate his father's capacity for contempt.

The narrative point of view returns to Okeke in the village. Nnaemeka periodically writes to his father to suggest a visit, but Okeke insists he cannot let him into his home. While Nnaemeka had earlier believed it was possible to continue his split identity, traveling between the city and the village, Okeke keeps his son at a distance, refusing to let Nnaemeka get away with his betrayal.

Okeke's prejudice is not confined to the village. Ibo people who encounter Nene in Lagos treat her with a performative deference, being overly polite so as to make her feel she is not one of them. However, Nene matches Okeke's obstinacy, refusing to let his rejection of her bring her down. Eventually, Nene wins the Ibo women over, and they admit she keeps a good home. While people in the village know Nene and Nnaemeka to be a happy couple, Okeke insulates himself from having to think about them by reacting in childish anger whenever his son's name is mentioned. Having effectively

erasing their existence from his sphere of awareness, Okeke believes he has triumphed over the couple. However, he does not realize that he is setting himself up for a shock.

The shock arrives in a simple letter from Nene. Despite himself, Okeke glances over her words, which mention the existence of his grandsons, who would like to meet him. In all his years of stubborn resentment, it had not occurred to Okeke that Nene and Nnaemeka would have children. In the same moment he learns of his grandsons, a storm comes to the village, pelting Okeke's roof with rain. Although he tries to hum a hymn to ignore the emotions breaking through his hardened resolve, the sound of the rain is too great.

The storm makes it impossible for Okeke to ignore the feeling of familial affection any longer. In an image that symbolizes his callousness, Okeke imagines his grandsons standing in the rain, shut out of his home. Okeke realizes then that it was wrong of him to reject his family. He goes to sleep that night hoping he will have the opportunity to make it up to his grandsons. However, in an instance of situational irony, he fears that his epiphany has come too late and that he may die before he has the chance to make amends.

11.5 CHARACTER LIST

11.5.1 NENE

Nene is a young schoolteacher living in Lagos, Nigeria. She is engaged and then married to Nnaemeka, eventually giving birth to two unnamed sons. Although she is Christian, Nene is not an Ibo like Nnaemeka, leading Nnaemeka's father to refuse to accept the couple's union. Nene is so used to living in cosmopolitan Lagos that she is almost amused by Okeke's prejudice. Despite Okeke's many years of stubborn rejection, Nene persists in her belief that Okeke will accept their family, eventually appealing to his emotions by writing to tell him that his grandsons want to meet their grandfather.

11.5.2 NNAEMEKA

Nnaemeka is a young man from an Ibo village who lives and works in Lagos. More modern than his orthodox father, Nnaemeka breaks his community's tradition of

arranged marriage by opting to marry for love. Although Nnaemeka anticipates his father's disapproval, he doesn't predict his father's decision to disown him, holding a grudge for years.

11.5.3 UGOYE NWEKE

Ugoye is an Ibo woman from Nnaemeka's village who Okeke arranges for Nnaemeka to marry. Although Okeke thinks she will serve as a good Christian wife, Nnaemeka remembers Ugoye from his youth, knowing her to be slow-witted and prone to fighting.

11.5.4 OKEKE

Okeke is Nnaemeka's father. Living in an unnamed Ibo village, Okeke is a devout Christian and traditionalist who believes marriages should be arranged by one's family and rejects the importance of marrying for love. When his son betrays his wishes, Okeke reveals his obstinacy and ability to hold a grudge, refusing for several years to have anything to do with his son and his daughter-in-law. Upon learning of the existence of his grandsons, Okeke feels remorse for having cut his family out of his life and he hopes he will live long enough to make it up to them.

11.6 SYMBOLS

11.6.1 MUTILATED WEDDING PICTURE

The cut-up wedding picture of Nene and Nnaemeka is a symbol of Okeke's stubborn refusal to accept Nene as his son's wife. Even though Okeke does not approve of their marriage, Nene and Nnaemeka send Okeke a photograph of the couple on their wedding day, believing that he will reverse his position. To show his sustained contempt for their union, Okeke cuts Nene's figure out of the picture of the couple and mails it back. Nene cries when she sees the mutilated image, not having anticipated that the old man's disdain for her could be so strong.

11.6.2 HERBALIST'S MEDICINE

The herbalist's medicine is a symbol of loyalty. Midway through the story, Okeke's fellow villagers commiserate with him about his son's decision to marry for love.

The men discuss how Okeke ought to hire a native doctor herbalist to prepare *Amalile*, a medicine that supposedly induces cheating husbands to return their loyalty to their wives. Okeke is opposed to the idea, citing the example of Mrs. Ochuba, a woman who tried out the Amalile by feeding it to the herbalist instead of her husband, a change which resulted in the herbalist's death. Ultimately, the knowledge of his grandsons causes Okeke to regret his rejection of his family, showing how the grandsons bring about familial loyalty in Okeke in the same way *Amalile* is said to promote loyalty in men.

11.6.3 STORM

The storm at the end of "Marriage is a Private Affair" symbolizes Okeke's emotional state. A storm is first mentioned in relation to Okeke's emotions when Nnaemeka insists that Nene is the only woman he can marry and Nnaemeka expects his father will unleash a storm of anger. That storm doesn't come, as Okeke instead recedes from his son physically and emotionally. The storm finally arrives at the end of the story, after Okeke learns that he has grandsons. However, the sudden appearance of a storm in the sky coincides not with Okeke's anger but with his sorrow and regret. Achebe writes that "it was one of those rare occasions when even Nature takes a hand in a human fight," implying that the heavy rains help convince Okeke that he needs to give up his opposition to his son's marriage. With the rain beating down on his roof, Okeke is distracted in his attempt at humming a hymn by the mental image of his grandsons standing outside, shut out of his house. Okeke cannot bear to think of himself inflicting this rejection upon his grandsons. He goes to sleep full of remorse for his behavior, hoping he will live long enough to make it up to the boys. In this way, the storm represents the love and affection Okeke has needed to hold back to sustain his obstinate disapproval of his son's choice to marry for love.

11.7 METAPHOR

11.7.1 TURNED OVER IN HIS MIND

After the opening scene in which Nnaemeka and Nene discuss how Nnaemeka will break the news of the couple's engagement to Nnaemeka's father, Nnaemeka walks home with his mind full of thoughts about the issue. Achebe writes that that "he turned

over in his mind the different ways of overcoming his father's opposition, especially now that he had gone and found a girl for him." In this figure of speech, Achebe uses the metaphor of turning something over in one's mind to emphasize how Nnaemeka thinks continuously about what to tell his father, as though the problem is an object he is physically turning over to examine from every angle.

11.7.2 AMAZON OF A GIRL

When Nnaemeka reads the letter from his father proposing an arranged marriage with a woman from their village, Nnaemeka can't help but smile to himself. Achebe writes that "he remembered Ugoye quite well, an Amazon of a girl who used to beat up all the boys, himself included, on the way to the stream, a complete dunce at school." In this passage, Achebe uses the metaphor "Amazon of a girl" to imply that Ugoye was strong and prone to fighting, reminiscent of the Amazon women warriors of Greek mythology who could match men's abilities in combat.

11.7.3 EXPECTED THE STORM TO BURST

After Nnaemeka tells Okeke that Nene is the only woman he can marry, Nnaemeka believes the statement will be met with a swift condemnation from his father. Achebe writes, "This was a very rash reply and Nnaemeka expected the storm to burst. But it did not." In this passage, Achebe uses the metaphor "expected the storm to burst" to illustrate the overpowering torrents of angry speech that Okeke is known to unleash.

11.8 IRONY

11.8.1 NNAEMEKA'S FATHER HAS ARRANGED A MARRIAGE (DRAMATIC IRONY)

In the story's opening scene, Nene asks Nnaemeka why he hasn't told his father the good news about their engagement. Nnaemeka explains that his father will be prejudiced against her because she is not Ibo, and insists it will be best to tell him in person. The narrator soon reveals that this is not the full truth: As Nnaemeka walks home from Nene's, the narrator comments on how the situation is especially complicated for Nnaemeka because his father has found him a potential bride from their village. In this instance of dramatic irony, the reader understands the full extent of

Nnaemeka's conflict while Nene remains unaware of how seriously committed Nnaemeka's father is to the tradition of arranged marriage.

11.8.2 OKEKE GOES QUIET (SITUATIONAL IRONY)

When Nnaemeka visits his father to break the news of his engagement to Nene, Nnaemeka expects his father will unleash a storm of anger. But in an instance of situational irony, Nnaemeka's expectations are undermined: rather than erupt in anger, Okeke expresses his disappointment by going quiet and retiring to his bedroom for the night—a reaction that is more subdued yet more serious. The difference between what Nnaemeka expects and what occurs implies that Nnaemeka had underestimated his father's attachment to the custom of arranged marriage.

11.8.3 OKEKE CHANGES HIS MIND WHEN IT MAY BE TOO LATE (SITUATIONAL IRONY)

Although Okeke succeeds in hardening his heart against his son and daughter-in-law for the majority of the story, the news that he has two grandsons who would like to visit causes Okeke to soften and to feel an emotional connection to his family. Okeke goes to sleep full of remorse for his actions and a "vague fear" that he will die before he has the chance to make it up to his family. In this instance of situational irony, Nene succeeds in breaking down Okeke's defenses. However, Okeke's change of heart may have come too late for him to undo the damage.

11.9 IMAGERY

11.9.1 A HIGH WIND BEGAN TO BLOW (KINESTHETIC IMAGERY)

When Okeke reads Nene's letter and learns that his grandsons want to meet him, the old man feels the resistance he built up to his family crumbling. As if to distract himself from his faltering resolve, Okeke leans on the window. The sky is black and "a high wind began to blow, filling the air with dust and dry leaves." In this example of kinesthetic imagery, Achebe captures the movement of the impending storm by describing how the air fills with the dust and leaves the wind kicks up.

11.9.2 HER EYES FILLED WITH TEARS (VISUAL IMAGERY)

After they marry, Nene and Nnaemeka send a photo from their wedding day to Okeke. He sends the picture back cut up, having symbolically separated the newly wed couple. In an example of visual imagery, Achebe writes, "When Nene read through this letter and looked at the mutilated picture her eyes filled with tears, and she began to sob." In describing Nene's bodily reaction to the hateful letter and ruined photo, Achebe emphasizes how deeply she is affected by Okeke's contempt.

11.9.3 PATTERING OF LARGE RAIN DROPS (AUDITORY IMAGERY)

At the end of the story, as a storm breaks over his home, Okeke tries to "hum a favourite hymn but the pattering of large rain drops on the roof broke up the tune." In this example of auditory imagery, Achebe contrasts the sound of Okeke's humming with the louder and more persistent sound of raindrops on his roof. With this contrast, Achebe illustrates how the storm overpowers Okeke's resolve and forces him to imagine his grandchildren standing out in the rain.

11.10 THEMES

11.10.1 ARRANGED MARRIAGE VS. LOVE

The central conflict in "Marriage is a Private Affair" stems from Nnaemeka's and his father's clashing conceptions of what makes a good marriage. The village-dwelling Okeke stubbornly insists upon the Ibo tradition of arranged marriage, which is orchestrated and agreed upon by the bride and groom's families, often ignoring the wishes of the couple being wed. Nnaemeka, however, values love over tradition, and thus finds a wife who is not Ibo but whom he knows he will be happy with. Nnaemeka's arguments in favor of privileging love over tradition do not sway Okeke: When Nnaemeka protests to his father that he cannot marry Ugoye because he does not love her, Okeke replies, "Nobody said you did. Why should you?" Nnaemeka insists that contemporary ideas around marriage are different than they were when Okeke was young, but Okeke refuses to accept his son's appeal, insisting that nothing about marriage has changed and the only important qualities in a wife are her Christian upbringing and good character. Ultimately, in their clashing views of matrimony,

Nnaemeka embodies a modern privileging of emotion over convention while Okeke exemplifies an orthodoxy that gradually loses the battle against feelings.

11.10.2 OBSTINACY

Obstinacy—the quality of stubbornly sticking to an opinion in the face of persuasion—is another of the story's major themes. Embodied in Okeke's refusal to accept his son's decision to marry for love, obstinacy enables Okeke to reject every emotional appeal Nnaemeka and Nene make to him over the years. Preferring to disown his son rather than entertain the possibility that he is not entitled to determine who his son marries, Okeke grows to old age alone in his village, becoming so angry when his son is mentioned that villagers learn to keep their mouths shut about the happy couple. Okeke's obstinacy leads him to cut up Nnaemeka and Nene's wedding picture and send it back to the couple as a symbol of his contempt. It is only when Okeke learns that he has grandsons that his obstinacy is shaken. Having successfully hardened his heart to his family, Okeke finally loses the battle against familial affection when he pictures his grandsons standing in the rain, shut out from his home. By the end of the story, Okeke feels remorse for having been so stubborn and unfeeling.

11.10.3 TRADITION VS. MODERNITY

The tensions that arise from the conflict between tradition and modernity is another central theme in "Marriage is a Private Affair." Explored overtly through the conflict between arranged marriage and marrying for love, as well as the juxtaposition between city life and rural life, the theme of tradition vs. modernity also arises within the dynamics of Okeke's village. Despite his obstinate rejection of his son's decision to marry for love, Okeke is considered more modern than his fellow villagers. When other men discuss the option of hiring a herbalist to brew a concoction that could keep Nnaemeka's heart under his father's control, Okeke rejects the idea, as he is "known to be obstinately ahead of his more superstitious neighbours in these matters." However, Okeke is unaware of the hypocrisy of having a steadfast adherence to the tradition of arranged marriage while easily dismissing the concept of traditional medicine. Nene and Nnaemeka also hold a mix of traditional and modern values. While they are willing to

disobey Okeke in the matter of love and marriage, they cannot reject him in the way he rejects them, continuing to reach out to him in the tradition of honoring one's elders.

11.10.4 CITY VS. VILLAGE

In "Marriage is a Private Affair," Achebe juxtaposes the differences between city life in Lagos and rural life in an Ibo village. While urbanity is associated with a diversity of backgrounds and viewpoints, the village is associated with tradition, adherence to a singular culture, superstition, religiosity, and a stubborn refusal to change. While Nene represents the city, having lived so long in the "cosmopolitan atmosphere" of Lagos that she is surprised to learn that Nnaemeka's father still believes in arranged marriage, Okeke represents the country, obstinate in his belief in tradition. Regularly traveling between the city and the village, Nnaemeka finds himself torn between his newfound urban identity and his rural origins, feeling allegiance to both his wife and his father. Although Achebe begins the story from Nnaemeka's point of view in the city, the narrative point of view stays in the village after Okeke rejects his son. The shift in perspective immerses the reader in Okeke's stubborn and lonely life apart from family. Alone, Okeke cannot pass on any wisdom or traditions to his grandsons—a state of affairs Okeke comes to regret. In this way, "Marriage is a Private Affair" illustrates how the village's refusal to adapt to the cultural changes brought about in the city leads to a greater divide that will cause the village and its traditions to die out.

11.11 LETUS SUM UP

“Marriage is a Private Affair” is a short story written in the early 50s by Chinua Achebe before Nigeria gained its independance from the British Empire. It was considered one of the famous literary works of the post-colonial period. The story centers around a young couple, Nene and Nnaemeka, living in Lagos, Nigeria, who plan on getting married. In the opening conversation, Nnaemeka expresses his concerns about notifying his father about the upcoming marriage. Nnaemeka’s father, Okeke, is from the Ibo tribe, where traditionally the parents choose a bride for their sons, and he won’t accept Nnaemeka’s decision to marry a woman on his own. Since Nnaemeka has received a letter from his father stating that Okeke has chosen him a bride Ugoye, the naughty girl who used to beat boys at school. Nnaemeka decides to visit his father and

tell him the news face to face. When Nnaemeka informs his father that he plans on marrying Nene, who is from a different tribe, Okeke disapproves of the marriage and shuns his son. Nnaemeka leaves for Lagos and hopes that one day Okeke will relent and accept him and Nene into his life. Unfortunately, Okeke remains obstinate and refuses to acknowledge Nnaemeka and Nene because they've broken the tradition. Years pass and the married couple grows into a loving family and is accepted by the ibo members living in the city of Lagos. At the end of the story, Nene sends Nnaemeka's father a letter informing him that he has two grandchildren. Nene asks Okeke if she can send them to visit their grandfather. After reading the letter, Okeke begins to feel guilty and looks out into the stormy weather as he worries if he will ever be able to make it up to them.

11.12 REFERENCE

https://marwamaroua.medium.com/a-brief-summary-of-the-fiction-marriage-is-a-private-affair-by-chinua-achebe-9703f9c01c46

LESSON 12: PATRICK WHITE- A GLASS OF TEA

12.1 AUTHOR INTRODUCTION

Patrick White (1912-1990) was an Australian novelist and playwright, widely regarded as one of the most important English-language writers of the twentieth century. Known for his dense prose and complex characters, Literary Style of White's works often explore themes of spirituality, the search for identity, and the harsh realities of Australian life. His major works are *The Tree of Man* (1955): A novel that follows the lives of a farming family in rural Australia, exploring themes of isolation and connection; *Voss* (1957): A historical novel based on the journey of explorer Ludwig Leichhardt, exploring themes of obsession and spirituality; *Riders in the Chariot* (1961): A novel that intertwines the lives of four individuals in Australia, exploring themes of social outcasts and spiritual redemption; *The Vivisector* (1970): A novel about an Australian artist, exploring themes of creativity and the moral cost of artistic genius.

White's writing style and themes are often characterized by its introspective and philosophical tone, grappling with questions of human existence and the complexities of relationships. White was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1973, recognizing his contribution to literature with the citation praising his "epic and psychological narrative art which has introduced a new continent into literature". Patrick White's works continue to be studied and celebrated for their profound exploration of Australian identity, spirituality, and the human condition.

12.2 WORK INTRODUCTION

"A Glass of Tea" by Patrick White is a short story that explores themes of memory, nostalgia, and the passage of time. The narrative focuses on the protagonist reflecting on past relationships and experiences, triggered by the seemingly simple act of sharing a glass of tea.

12.3 SUMMARY

The story opens with the protagonist, an older individual, recalling a past visit to a friend's house where they shared tea. This memory is layered with rich sensory details, highlighting the warmth and intimacy of the moment. The act of drinking tea becomes a symbolic ritual, evoking memories of friendship, love, and the complexity of human connections.

As the protagonist reminisces, the story delves into the emotional undercurrents of their past interactions, exploring themes of longing and regret. The tea serves as a metaphor for both comfort and transience, encapsulating the fleeting nature of life and relationships.

Through vivid imagery and introspective narration, White captures the subtle shifts in emotions and the impact of time on the protagonist’s perceptions. The story ultimately underscores the bittersweet nature of memory and the enduring significance of seemingly mundane moments.

12.4 THEMES

12.4.1 MEMORY AND NOSTALGIA

The story is deeply rooted in the exploration of memory. The protagonist reflects on past events, evoking a sense of nostalgia. The act of drinking tea serves as a trigger for these memories, bringing back vivid images and emotions from the past. White effectively uses these memories to explore how our past shapes our present identity and emotions.

12.4.2 TRANSIENCE OF LIFE

The recurring motif of tea symbolizes the transient nature of life. Just as a glass of tea is temporary, so are the moments and relationships that the protagonist reflects upon. This highlights the ephemeral quality of human experiences and the inevitability of change over time.

12.4.3 INTIMACY AND ISOLATION

While the protagonist recalls moments of intimacy and connection, there is an underlying sense of isolation. The warmth of shared experiences contrasts with the loneliness that often accompanies reminiscence. This duality captures the complexity of human relationships, where moments of closeness are intertwined with feelings of solitude.

12.5 STYLE

White’s writing is characterized by lyrical prose and a keen attention to detail, which brings the characters’ internal landscapes to life. The story’s reflective tone invites readers to contemplate their own experiences and the significance of ordinary moments.

In conclusion, "A Glass of Tea" is a poignant meditation on the nature of memory and the enduring impact of seemingly small, shared experiences.

12.6 CHARACTERS

The protagonist is the central figure through whom the story unfolds. Their reflections reveal a nuanced emotional landscape, filled with longing, regret, and tenderness. The other characters, although not always physically present in the

narrative, are vividly brought to life through the protagonist's memories, showcasing their significance in the protagonist's life.

12.7.SYMBOLISM

12.7.1 THE GLASS OF TEA

The glass of tea is a powerful symbol representing comfort, warmth, and the rituals of everyday life. It also serves as a metaphor for the passage of time, reminding the protagonist of the fleeting nature of human connections. The act of sharing tea becomes a poignant reminder of past intimacy and the simplicity of moments that carry deeper emotional weight.

12.7.2 STYLE AND TONE

Patrick White's prose is characterized by lyrical and introspective language. His detailed descriptions and rich sensory imagery draw readers into the protagonist's inner world, allowing them to experience the depth of their reflections. The tone is contemplative and melancholic, inviting readers to ponder their own memories and the significance of their personal relationships.

12.8 CONCLUSION

"A Glass of Tea" is a meditation on memory, loss, and the intricate web of human relationships. Through the protagonist's reflections, White delves into the beauty and sorrow of recollection, reminding us of the importance of cherishing fleeting moments. The story's exploration of memory and intimacy resonates with readers, offering a poignant commentary on the human experience.

12.9 LET US SUM UP

A Greek bachelor reluctantly accept an invitation for tea of another, elderly Greek man living in Geneva. Over tea, the old man tells about his life-in various places. They are drinking from tea glasses with a history: A gipsy once prophesied that the man would live until all tea glasses of a set he was given as a present were broken. He has a wife what retreats from society, does not like but accepts his way of life, which includes lots of traveling and having mistresses.

It turns out that not only the tea glasses break over time, but also his wife: She commits suicide by jumping off a high place. The old man then married the servant of his former wife. The bachelor leaves, having been captivated by the old man's story.

12.10 REFERENCES

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LESSON 13: IAN MCDONALD: DRIFTINGS

13.1 AUTHOR INTRODUCTION

Ian McDonald (born 1960) is a science fiction writer living in Northern Ireland, outside Belfast. He is a multiple award winner. His novels include *Brasyl* (2007), *Rivers of Gods* (2004*)*, *Ares Express* (2001), *Kirinya* (1998) and *Desolation Road* (1988). He is also a prolific writer of short stories and novellas. He has received BSFA award five times for both novel and short fiction categories. He has also won Philip K. Dick award, the Hugo award, the LOCUS award for best first novel and the Theodore Sturgeon Memorial award.

13.2 WORK INTRODUCTION

“Driftings” is a short science fiction which warns us of the eerie life that we would face in future due to abuse of environment. The protagonist Reith collects the drifting and recreates new objects and makes a living.

13.3 SUMMARY

“Driftings” is a surreal tale about a man, Reith, who collects items from the sea–hats, animals, plastic toys, and the like–and crafts them into items of art. The driftings are so large that they are taking over his house. When he meets a mysterious young woman and invites her to coffee, strange things start happening. Sugar becomes salt, bad for the coffee. After some initial hesitation, he invites her home to see his driftings. She

insinuates that he has wrongly taken some things from the sea and should give them back. In the end, after an impossible weather event, Reith must make a momentous decision about his artistic future.

13. 4 ANALYSIS

"Driftings" follows Reith, a boy who collects various items washed ashore--hats, animals, plastic toys and transforms them into art. Reith's collection of drifted items symbolizes the creative process. When he meets a mysterious young girl and invites her for coffee, peculiar occurrences unfold: sugar turns to salt, affecting the flavour of their drink. The transformation of sugar into salt serves as a metaphor for distortion of reality, reflecting Reith's internal conflict. The girl's suggestion that Reith has wrongly taken items from the sea raises questions about ownership and the creation. The weather event at the end serves as a metaphor for change-both in Reith's artistic journey and in his personal life. It suggests that external forces can dramatically alter one's path.

13.5 CHARACTER LIST

Reith: Reith serves as a protagonist of the short story and whose job is to collect items from sea and make into items of art. When he meets a mysterious young girl, a strange things starts to happen in his life. His obsession with collecting items reflects a desire to preserve memories and experiences, yet it also hints at a potential hoarding mentality that could lead to chaos.

A young girl: She represents a catalyst for change in Reith's life. She embodies playfulness and intrigue, drawing Reith out of his introspection. Her light-hearted demeanor contrasts with Reith's seriousness, hinting at a deeper connection and potential for shared experiences.

13.6. LET US SUM UP

"Driftings" is a surreal story about Reith, a man who turns sea-found objects into art. As his collection grows uncontrollably, he meets a mysterious girl who warns him that he has taken things from the sea that is strangeStrange occurances like sugar

turning to salt. Eventually, after a bizarre weather event, Reith is forced to confront the consequences which decide the fate of his art.

Self Assessment Questions:

4.1

Discuss the narrator's attitude towards her gender role

The narrator is ambivalent about her gender role, feeling trapped by societal expectations. She struggles to reconcile her desire for independence with the limitations placed on her as a girl. This tension reflects the complexities of growing up female.

Inscribe the significance does the horse have in the story.

The horse represents freedom and escape for the narrator, symbolizing her desire to transcend her circumstances. The horse also serves as a catalyst for the narrator's growing awareness of her own identity and desires. Through the horse, Munro explores themes of empowerment and self-discovery.

4.2

Carve the significance of the title "Marriage is a Private Affair".

The title highlights the tension between traditional and modern values in the story, emphasizing the private nature of marriage. Achebe uses the title to explore the complexities of cultural identity and the challenges of navigating multiple worlds. The title also underscores the theme of individual agency in marriage.

Discuss the role of Nene's family play in the story.

Nene's family serves as a symbol of traditional values and cultural heritage, highlighting the expectations placed on individuals within their community. The family's disapproval of Nene's marriage reflects the tensions between tradition and modernity, underscoring the challenges of navigating cultural change. Through Nene's family, Achebe explores the complexities of cultural identity.

4.3

Discuss significance does the glass of tea hold for the characters.

The glass of tea serves as a symbol of comfort and solace, representing the characters' desire for human connection. The tea also highlights the themes of isolation and loneliness, underscoring the characters' disconnection from others. Through the tea, White explores the complexities of human relationships.

Identify the setting play in the story.

The setting of the story serves as a symbol of the characters' emotional states, reflecting their feelings of isolation and disconnection. The setting also underscores the themes of loneliness and disconnection, highlighting the characters' struggles to form meaningful relationships. Through the setting, White explores the complexities of the human experience.

4.4

What significance does the river hold for the protagonist?

The river serves as a symbol of change and transformation, representing the protagonist's journey towards self-discovery. The river also highlights the themes of identity and belonging, underscoring the protagonist's search for his place in the world. Through the river, McDonald explores the complexities of growing up.

Five Marks

1. Scrutinize the relationship between the narrator and her father in "Boys and Girls". What does their relationship reveal about the complexities of family dynamics?

2. Converse the cultural significance of marriage in "Marriage is a Private Affair". How does Achebe use the story to explore the tensions between tradition and modernity?
3. Study the character of Nene in "Marriage is a Private Affair". What does her experience reveal about the challenges faced by women in patriarchal societies?
4. Analyze the symbolism of the glass of tea in the story. What does it represent in terms of the characters' relationships and emotional states?
5. Explore the theme of isolation and loneliness in "A Glass of Tea". How does White use the characters' experiences to reflect on the human condition?
6. Argue the theme of identity and belonging in "Drifting". How does the protagonist's experience reflect the challenges of finding one's place in the world?

Eight Marks

1. How does the narrator's relationship with her brother compare to her relationship with her father in "Boys and Girls"? What do these relationships reveal about gender roles and expectations?
2. Formulate an argument for or against the idea that "marriage is a private affair" based on the story. Develop your argument using evidence from the text and considering the cultural context.
3. Imagine an alternative design for the story "A Glass of Tea" where the narrative is structured around a different character's perspective. How would this modify our understanding of the themes and relationships in the story?
4. Predict how the protagonist's life would change in the future in "Drifting". Use evidence from the text to support your prediction and consider the effects of abuse of environment.

Unit V

Indian Short Stories

UNIT V- INDIAN SHORT STORIES

LESSON 14: R.K. NARAYAN: A HORSE AND TWO GOATS

14.1 AUTHOR INTRODUCTION

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayanaswami (1906–2001),better known as R. K. Narayan, was an Indian writer and novelist known for his work set in the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi. He was a leading author of early Indian literature in English along with Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao.

Narayan's mentor and friend Graham Greene was instrumental in getting publishers for Narayan's first four books including the semi-autobiographical trilogy of *Swami and Friends*, *The Bachelor of Arts* and *The English Teacher*. The fictional town of Malgudi was first introduced in *Swami and Friends*. *The Financial Expert* was hailed as one of the most original works of 1951 and Sahitya Academy Award winner *The Guide* was adapted for the film (winning a Filmfare Award for Best Film) and for Broadway.

Narayan highlights the social context and everyday life of his characters. He has been compared to William Faulkner who created a similar fictional town and likewise explored with humor and compassion the energy of ordinary life. Narayan's short stories have been compared with those of Guy de Maupassant because of his ability to compress a narrative.

In a career that spanned over sixty years Narayan received many awards and honours including the AC Benson Medal from the Royal Society of Literature, the Padma Vibhushan and the Padma Bhushan, India's second and third highest civilian awards, and in 1994 the Sahitya Akademi Fellowship, the highest honour of India's National Academy of Letters.He was also nominated to the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the Indian Parliament.

14.1.1 WRITING STYLE

Narayan's writing technique was unpretentious with a natural element of humour about it. It focused on ordinary people, reminding the reader of next-door neighbours, cousins and the like, thereby providing a greater ability to relate to the topic. Unlike his

national contemporaries, he was able to write about the intricacies of Indian society without having to modify his characteristic simplicity to confirm to trends and fashions in fiction writing. He also employed the use of nuanced dialogic prose with gentle Tamil overtones based on the nature of his characters. Critics have considered Narayan to be the Indian Chekhov, due to the similarities in their writings, the simplicity and the gentle beauty and humour in tragic situations.Greene considered Narayan to be more similar to Chekhov than any Indian writer. Anthony West of The New Yorker considered Narayan's writings to be of the realism variety of Nikolai Gogol.

According to Pulitzer Prize winner Jhumpa Lahiri, Narayan's short stories have the same captivating feeling as his novels, with most of them less than ten pages long, and taking about as many minutes to read. She adds that Narayan provides the reader something novelists struggle to achieve in hundreds more pages: a complete insight to the lives of his character between the title sentence and the ends. These characteristics and abilities led Lahiri to classify him as belonging to the pantheon of short-story geniuses that include O. Henry, Frank O'Connor and Flannery O'Connor. Lahiri also compares him to Guy de Maupassant for their ability to compress the narrative without losing the story, and the common themes of middle-class life written with an unyielding and unpitying vision. V. S. Naipaul noted that he "wrote from deep within his community", and did not, in his treatment of characters, "put his people on display".

Critics have noted that Narayan's writings tend to be more descriptive and less analytical; the objective style, rooted in a detached spirit, providing for a more authentic and realistic narration.His attitude, coupled with his perception of life, provided a unique ability to fuse characters and actions, and an ability to use ordinary events to create a connection in the mind of the reader. A significant contributor to his writing style was his creation of Malgudi, a stereotypical small town, where the standard norms of superstition and tradition apply.

Narayan's writing style was often compared to that of William Faulkner since both their works brought out the humour and energy of ordinary life while displaying compassionate humanism. The similarities also extended to their juxtaposing of the demands of society against the confusions of individuality. Although their approach to

subjects was similar, their methods were different; Faulkner was rhetorical and illustrated his points with immense prose while Narayan was very simple and realistic, capturing the elements all the same.

14.1.2 MALGUDI

Malgudi is a fictional fully urban town in southern India, conjured by Narayan. He created the town in September 1930, on Vijayadashami, an auspicious day to start new efforts and thus chosen for him by his grandfather.As he mentioned in a later interview to his biographers Susan and N. Ram, in his mind, he first saw a railway station, and slowly the name Malgudi came to him. The town was created with an impeccable historical record, dating to the Ramayana days when it was noted that Lord Rama passed through; it was also said that the Buddha visited the town during his travels. While Narayan never provided strict physical constraints for the town, he allowed it to form shape with events in various stories, becoming a reference point for the future. Dr James M. Fennelly, a scholar of Narayan's works, created a map of Malgudi based on the fictional descriptors of the town from the many books and stories.

Malgudi evolved with the changing political landscape of India. In the 1980s, when the nationalistic fervor in India dictated the changing of British names of towns and localities and removal of British landmarks, Malgudi's mayor and city council removed the long-standing statue of Frederick Lawley, one of Malgudi's early residents. However, when the Historical Societies showed proof that Lawley was strong in his support of the Indian independence movement, the council was forced to undo all their earlier actions. A good comparison to Malgudi, a place that Greene characterised as "more familiar than Battersea or Euston Road", is Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County.Also, like Faulkner's, when one looks at Narayan's works, the town gets a better definition through the many different novels and stories.

14.1.3 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Narayan first broke through with the help of Graham Greene who, upon reading Swaminathan and Tate, took it upon himself to work as Narayan's agent for the book. He was also significant in changing the title to the more appropriate Swami and Friends, and in finding publishers for Narayan's next few books. While Narayan's early works were not

commercial successes, other authors of the time began to notice him. Somerset Maugham, on a trip to Mysore in 1938, had asked to meet Narayan, but not enough people had heard of him to actually effect the meeting. Maugham subsequently read Narayan's The Dark Room, and wrote to him expressing his admiration. Another contemporary writer who took a liking to Narayan's early works was E. M. Forster, an author who shared his dry and humorous narrative, so much so that Narayan was labeled the "South Indian E. M. Forster" by critics.Despite his popularity with the reading public and fellow writers, Narayan's work has not received the same amount of critical exploration accorded to other writers of his stature.

Narayan's success in the United States came a little later, when Michigan State University Press started publishing his books. His first visit to the country was on a fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation, and he lectured at various universities including Michigan State University and the University of California, Berkeley. Around this time, John Updike noticed his work and compared Narayan to Charles Dickens. In a review of Narayan's works published in The New Yorker, Updike called him a writer of a vanishing breed—the writer as a citizen; one who identifies completely with his subjects and with a belief in the significance of humanity.

Having published many novels, essays and short stories, Narayan is credited with bringing Indian writing to the rest of the world. While he has been regarded as one of India's greatest writers of the twentieth century, critics have also described his writings with adjectives such as charming, harmless and benign.Narayan has also come in for criticism from later writers, particularly of Indian origin, who have classed his writings as having a pedestrian style with a shallow vocabulary and a narrow vision. According to Shashi Tharoor, Narayan's subjects are similar to those of Jane Austen as they both deal with a very small section of society. However, he adds that while Austen's prose was able to take those subjects beyond ordinariness, Narayan's was not.A similar opinion is held by Shashi Deshpande who characterizes Narayan's writings as pedestrian and naive because of the simplicity of his language and diction, combined with the lack of any complexity in the emotions and behaviours of his characters.

A general perception on Narayan was that he did not involve himself or his writings with the politics or problems of India, as mentioned by V. S. Naipaul in one of his columns. However, according to Wyatt Mason of The New Yorker, although Narayan's writings seem simple and display a lack of interest in politics, he delivers his narrative with an artful and deceptive technique when dealing with such subjects and does not entirely avoid them, rather letting the words play in the reader's mind. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, former vice-chancellor of Andhra University, says that Narayan wrote about political topics only in the context of his subjects, quite unlike his compatriot Mulk Raj Anand who dealt with the political structures and problems of the time. Paul Brians, in his book Modern South Asian Literature in English, says that the fact that Narayan completely ignored British rule and focused on the private lives of his characters is a political statement on its own, declaring his independence from the influence of colonialism.

In the west, Narayan's simplicity of writing was well received. One of his biographers, William Walsh, wrote of his narrative as a comedic art with an inclusive vision informed by the transience and illusion of human action. Multiple Booker nominee Anita Desai classes his writings as "compassionate realism" where the cardinal sins are unkindness and immodesty. According to Mason, in Narayan's works, the individual is not a private entity, but rather a public one and this concept is an innovation that can be called his own. In addition to his early works being among the most important English-language fiction from India, with this innovation, he provided his western readers the first works in English to be infused with an eastern and Hindu existential perspective. Mason also holds the view that Edmund Wilson's assessment of Walt Whitman, "He does not write editorials on events but describes his actual feelings", applies equally to Narayan.

14.2 SUMMARY

The story is focused on a villager ‘Muni’ who has two goats. He eventually enters into a miscommunication with an American. American thinks Muni as the owner of the horse statue and buys it for a hundred rupee note. Muni thinks it as a deal for his goats. He tells his wife the same. She accuses him of theft. Let us study A Horse and Two Goats Summary in detail.

The story focuses on a villager “Muni” who once owned a herd of forty sheep and goats. However, he has only two goats now. Muni takes his breakfast and then shakes down his drum sticks from the tree in front of his residence. Then he expresses his wish for a drumstick sauce. However, his wife asks him to bring groceries for the house. Muni makes efforts to arrange for the groceries from the village shop on credit but fails. Furthermore, he gets humiliation from his wife for his failure. Then, he takes his goats and moves to a place in the outskirts of the village beside the highway for grazing his goats.

Then, Muni sits under the horse statue made of clay to protect himself from the sun. He watches the trucks. Furthermore, he sees a yellow station wagon coming towards him. A red-faced American gets out of the wagon and enquires about the nearest gas station. Muni thought him to be a policeman or a soldier who had come to enquire about the crime that took place in the nearby village. This misconception took place due to his Khaki dress. However, on finding the American friendly through his gestures, he tells him his story.

Both of them tell each other their story. Muni tells how his cattle were taken off by cheetahs and jackals. Also, he tells that he has never gone to school as only Brahmins were provided education those days. Furthermore, he tells him about the temple priest who could see the face of the thief in the camphor. He adds that all the bad men would be destroyed at the end of kali yuga. Also, he expresses his anger towards the village chief who has become rich by gathering a lot of wealth.

The American also tells Muni about his being a businessman dealing in coffee. He was forced to work four hours when there was no electricity. The incident aroused curiosity in him to look at other civilisations and thus he visited India leaving his wife in Srinagar.

The statue of horse fascinated the American. He thought Muni to be the owner of the horse. He offers him one hundred rupees for buying it. Due to miscommunication, Muni took the dealing for his goats. He always dreamt of selling his goats and start a shop with the money. So he was happy. Moreover, the American was happy to buy the horse.

Muni tells his wife about the dealing. She could not believe his words and accused him of theft. Her suspicion gets stronger when the two goats return home just after that.

14.3 THEMES

14.3.1 CULTURE CLASH

The most important theme in ‘‘*A Horse and Two Goats*,’’ and in fact the central theme of Narayan’s work, is the clash of cultures, specifically the clash of Indian and Western cultures. Using humor instead of anger, Narayan demonstrates just how far apart the two worlds are: the two cultures exist in the same time and space, but literally and metaphorically speak different languages. The two main characters in this story couldn’t be more different: Muni is poor, rural, uneducated, Hindu, brown; the American is wealthy, urban, educated, probably Judeo-Christian, white. As a good Hindu, Muni calmly accepts the hand that fate has dealt him, while the American is willing and able to take drastic and sudden action to change his life (for example, flying off to India, or throwing away his return plane ticket to transport a horse statue home on a ship). Each man is quite ignorant of the other’s way of life.

Unlike many stories about culture clash, the inability to communicate in this story leads only to confusion, not to any real harm. In fact, although each feels vaguely dissatisfied with the conversation, the men do not realize that they are not communicating. Each speaks at length about his own life and local calamities, with no awareness that the other hears nothing. At the end of their encounter each man has what he wants or needs, and neither man has lost anything of value. As an Indian who writes only in English, Narayan himself has experienced the ways in which Indian and Western cultures conflict. While this conflict may be painful at times, here he finds it merely amusing.

14.3.2 WEALTH AND POVERTY

Although they have little in common, the most important way in which Muni and the American differ is in their respective level of wealth. Narayan takes great pains in the opening of the story to show how desperately poor Muni is, and to emphasize that even in his time of ‘‘prosperity’’ his standard of living was still greatly below that of most Americans. The American takes for granted his relative wealth and seems unaware of the difference between Muni and himself. He casually offers cigarettes to a man who has never seen one, complains about four hours without air conditioning to a man who

has never had electricity, brags about enjoying manual labor as a Sunday hobby to a man who grew up working in the fields from morning until night, and without a thought gives Muni enough money to open a business. He is not trying to show off; he simply accepts his wealth as his right. His very casualness emphasizes the gap between them. Narayan in no way condemns the man for being wealthy, or for not stepping in to aid the poor Muni, but he wants the two men and their relative wealth to be clear, so the reader can evaluate the relationship between wealth and worth.

14.3.3 KNOWLEDGE AND IGNORANCE

In a small way, ‘‘*A Horse and Two Goats* ’’ explores the different ways that a person can be educated. Muni, who grew up a member of a lower caste at a time when only the Brahmin, the highest caste, could attend school, has had no formal education. He has not traveled beyond his village, and he likes to watch trucks and buses go by on the highway a few miles away so that he can have ‘‘a sense of belonging to a larger world.’’ He does not even know his own age.

14.4 LET US SUM UP

The story depicts the cultural differences between the East and the West. Also, it throws light on poverty and wealth, a theme of knowledge and wisdom. Furthermore, it portrays the rural life in India, social classes, prevailing of the caste system, prejudices and superstitious beliefs.

LESSON 15: RAMA CHANDRA BEHERA- THE PASSENGER

15.1 AUTHOR INTRODUCTION

Dr Rama Chandra Behera (born 1945) is an iconic Odia writer. Rama Chandra Behera's short stories and novels eventually reach their culmination in overcoming all struggles which glorify human values built to a heightened scale. Behera has written stories, novels and also some plays for All india Radio, Cuttack. His first collection of stoties titled " Dwitiya Smasana" marked his arrival.

Behera has made significant contributions to literature through his short stories, novels, and essays, often delving into themes such as identity, existentialism, and the complexities of interpersonal relationships.

His writing style is characterized by a blend of introspection, social commentary, and lyrical prose, reflecting a deep understanding of the cultural and emotional landscapes of Odisha. Behera's narratives often feature ordinary individuals grappling with universal dilemmas, portrayed with sensitivity and depth that resonate with readers.

Throughout his career, Rama Chandra Behera has received acclaim for his ability to capture the essence of everyday life while exploring profound philosophical questions. His works continue to be celebrated for their literary merit and their contribution to Odia literature, making him a respected and influential voice in Indian regional writing.

15.2 WORK INTRODUCTION

The short story "The Passenger" is a notable work by renowned Odia author Rama Chandra Behera. It explores themes of human relationships, existentialism, and the complexities of life through a narrative that unfolds during a bus journey. The author's ability to bring in hope in the face of defeat and disaster is astounding. He is a master interpreter of life and struggle of common man. In this short story, "The Passenger", Rama Chandra Behera shows the struggle of a common man who decides to take his family to his native village in a crowded bus.

15.3 SUMMARY

"The Passenger" revolves around the protagonist, often unnamed in Behera's stories, who encounters a fellow passenger on a bus journey. The story captures their interactions and conversations, revealing layers of their personalities and life experiences. The narrative is often introspective, delving into the thoughts and emotions of the characters as they share moments of reflection during the journey. The characters engage in moments of reflection that highlight their inner thoughts, emotions, and the existential themes of the narrative. Here are some key moments of reflection that the characters share:

The people in the bus are the narrator, Aarti, narrator's wife; their two sons and one daughter; the bus conductor; narrator's father; narrator's sister; Gopal; Jitu, an 8 years old boy; Digamnbar Das, Jitu's father; a tea shop man; and fellow passengers.

The short begins in the narrator's office where the narrator is thinking whether to cancel the bus trip to his native village. few days ago the narrator has sent a letter to his father that he will surely come to the village to meet his only sister who got married a year back. Narrator is thinking about the cancellation of the bus trip from the city because he feels uneasy to take a family along with him to the village. the narrators wife Aarti who hates the narrators orthodox family And the village. They have three children two sons and a daughter.

The narrator's village was 40 km away from a city. If the narrator had to go to village he has to catch the last bus by 5 o'clock in evening so that he would reach the bus stop near his village at 9 o'clock. From that he had to walk for another 2 kms to reach his village. So the narrator finds it to be a tedious task. According to the narrator travelling in a crowded bus is better than walking with the family in the deep dark night. He is worried. Finally writer decides to go to village for two important reasons. One because of eagerness to see his only sister after marriage. The second is his father arranged for an accompanyment. He had asked one of the villages to accompany the narrator and the family from the bus stop to their house.

So by 4 o'clock the narrator leaves his office so as to go home to pick up his wife and three children. Sure that they should catch the last bus by 5 o'clock and so he

hurries home. As per day plan the five catch the last bus by 5 o'clock which is heavily crowded. After getting into the bus the narrator finds a little boy weeping. His name is Jitu. He is weeping because he has lost his father among the crowd in the bus. The name of the father is Digambar Das.

The issue is taken to the conductor who calls loud the father's name but there is no response as no such a person named Digambar Das is in the bus. So it becomes clear that the young boys father has failed to board the bus. Now comes Jitu's story. Jitu and his father have planned to go to Jitu's uncle's house which is near to the village of the narrator. Now the narrator feels it is his responsibility to take care of Jitu as both should get down at the same stop. Finally at 9 o'clock the family gets down at the stop.

Once they get down at the stop the narrator gets dejected as he finds no one to pick them up from the stop to the village. They feel disappointed as the narrator's father has not send any village man to pick them from the stop to the home. But to their surprise they find the small tea house open near the stopping which makes them feel a bit happy. As they approaches the tea shop and enquires about Gopal who is his uncle. The man said that Gopal has being suffering from severe fever for the past five days.

Now the narrator starts to enquire the man at the tea shop whether he had seen any villager waiting at the bus stop to receive guest from the city. The man at the tea shop replies that no one had come because of the heavy rain. After this conversation the man closes the tea shop and goes home.

All these continuous dejection and disappointment frustrate the narrator, and so the narrator decides to leave Jitu at the bus stop as he feels helpless. Now the narrator with his wife and three children starts to walk in the darkness to his home. Jitu left at the bus stop falls asleep on the bus stop bench.

After some distance of their walk, the narrator and his family is accompaned by some village men. At this occasion Aarti the mother of three children developed sympathy for Jitu who is alone at the bus stop. The narrator now realises the mistake and he goes back to bring the boy with him. When they reach the boy at the bus stop he sees that the boy is still sleeping. The face of the boys seems to be fearless, strong and

bold once he observes the boy's face. The boy is relaxed and sleeps peacefully. The story ends here.

15.4 ANALYSIS

The story begins with the narrator contemplating a journey to their native village to visit their sister, who recently got married. The decision is fraught with logistical challenges and family tensions, particularly due to the reluctance of the narrator's wife, Aarti, to visit the village.

The narrator decides to undertake the journey despite concerns, driven by familial obligations and the promise made to their father to visit the sister. This sets up the primary conflict of navigating familial expectations versus personal comfort and modern values represented by Aarti

While on a crowded bus to the village, the narrator and Aarti encounter Jitu, a young boy who has lost his father in the crowd. This encounter introduces an external conflict and dilemma, as the narrator feels compelled to care for Jitu alongside their own family responsibilities.

Throughout the journey, the narrative explores themes of responsibility, duty, and empathy. The narrator's decision to care for Jitu despite initial reservations reflects a growth in empathy and understanding, highlighting the transformative power of human connections in unexpected situations.

Upon reaching the village, the narrator and Aarti experience disappointment when there is no one to receive them as promised by the narrator's father. This moment underscores themes of resilience and adaptation as they navigate unexpected circumstances and setbacks.

Both the narrator and Aarti undergo character development through their interactions with Jitu and the challenges faced during the journey. Aarti, initially resistant to the village visit, develops empathy towards Jitu, showcasing her capacity for growth and understanding.

The story concludes with the narrator's realization of the strength and resilience in Jitu, who peacefully sleeps at the bus stop despite the uncertainties he faced earlier.

This resolution brings closure to the narrative, emphasizing the themes of empathy, responsibility, and the complexities of human relationships.

15.5 THEMES

15.5.1 FAMILY DYNAMICS AND RELATIONSHIPS

The story revolves around the narrator's journey to visit their sister in their village, highlighting the complexities of family bonds and responsibilities. It explores the tensions between modern values represented by Aarti and traditional expectations tied to the narrator's village and family.

15.5.2 RESPONSIBILITY AND DUTY

Central to the narrative is the theme of responsibility. The narrator feels obligated to visit their sister despite logistical challenges and Aarti's reluctance. This theme is further explored through the narrator's decision to care for Jitu, a young boy left alone on the bus, reflecting a sense of duty towards others in need.

15.5.3 EMPATHY AND COMPASSION

The story emphasizes empathy as the narrator and Aarti interact with Jitu, showing concern for his well-being despite their own frustrations and disappointments. It highlights how unexpected encounters can evoke empathy and lead to acts of kindness, even in challenging circumstances.

15.5.4 Cultural and Social Contrasts

Through Aarti's discomfort with the narrator's orthodox family and village, the story touches upon cultural contrasts and societal expectations. It explores the tension between urban modernity and rural traditions, reflecting broader social dynamics within contemporary Indian society.

15.6 NARRATIVE ELEMENTS

15.6.1 SETTING

The journey unfolds against the backdrop of a bus ride and a rural village, creating a contrast between urban and rural environments. The setting influences character interactions and underscores themes of journey and destination.

15.6.2 CONFLICT AND RESOLUTION

The story navigates internal conflicts within the narrator regarding familial obligations and external conflicts such as logistical challenges and unexpected circumstances like Jitu's predicament. Resolutions come through acts of empathy, responsibility, and adaptation.

15.6.3 SYMBOLISM

Elements like the bus ride, village tea shop, and Jitu's presence symbolize themes of journey, encounter, and resilience. They underscore the narrative's exploration of human connections and transformative moments.

15.7 CHARACTERS LIST

The characters are portrayed with nuanced personalities that reflect their individual experiences, perspectives, and emotional landscapes. While the story often leaves characters unnamed, they are developed through their interactions, dialogue, and introspective moments. Here's an exploration of the personalities typically found in Behera's narratives:

15.7.1 The Protagonist (Narrator):

1. **Contemplative and Responsible**:The narrator is portrayed as a thoughtful individual who weighs the pros and cons of decisions, such as whether to cancel the trip to the village due to logistical challenges and family tensions. Despite initial hesitations, the narrator ultimately takes responsibility for fulfilling promises made to family members, showing a sense of duty and commitment.

2. **Family-oriented**:The narrator is deeply connected to their family, particularly their sister who recently got married and whom they are eager to visit. This

familial bond motivates the narrator to overcome obstacles and undertake the journey despite uncertainties.

3. **Concerned and Caring**:Throughout the story, the narrator demonstrates concern for others' well-being, as seen in their decision to care for Jitu after the young boy loses his father on the bus. This caring nature extends to their own family members, ensuring they catch the last bus and providing support during moments of disappointment.

4. **Pragmatic and Reflective**:The narrator exhibits a pragmatic approach to challenges, preferring to take a crowded bus over walking in the dark with their family. This practical mindset reflects their awareness of the difficulties posed by rural travel and their consideration of safety and comfort.

5. **Empathetic**:The narrator shows empathy towards Jitu, recognizing the boy's vulnerability and offering support despite their own initial frustrations. This empathy is also evident in the concern shown towards their family members' expectations and well-being.

6. **Moment of Growth**: throughout the story, the narrator experiences moments of growth and realization, particularly when they initially consider leaving Jitu behind but ultimately return to ensure the boy's safety and well-being. This demonstrates a shift from initial self-concern to a broader empathy and responsibility towards others.

15.7.2 AARTI

1. **Strong-willed and Opinionated**:Aarti is depicted as a strong-willed character who holds firm opinions, particularly about the narrator's orthodox family and their village. She expresses dislike towards these aspects, indicating a sense of discomfort or disagreement with traditional values or practices.

2. **Protective of Her Family**:Aarti's concern for her own family's well-being is evident throughout the story. She accompanies the narrator and their three children on the journey to the village, despite her reservations, ensuring they navigate the challenges of travel together.

3. **Initial Discomfort and Resistance**:Initially, Aarti shows resistance towards the idea of visiting the narrator's village, possibly due to past experiences or perceived differences in values. Her reluctance to embrace this aspect of the narrator's life highlights her independent thinking and desire for autonomy.

4. **Develops Sympathy and Understanding**:As the story progresses, Aarti's attitude towards Jitu, the young boy they encounter on the bus, evolves. She develops sympathy for Jitu, recognizing his vulnerability and the challenges he faces. This empathy demonstrates Aarti's capacity for understanding and compassion beyond her initial reservations.

5. **Supportive and Adaptive**:Despite her initial discomfort, Aarti adapts to the circumstances of the journey, supporting the narrator and their children as they navigate unexpected challenges such as the absence of arrangements upon arrival at the village. Her supportive role underscores her commitment to family unity and resilience in unfamiliar situations.

6. **Moment of Reflection and Growth**:Aarti's journey in the story reflects moments of reflection and growth, particularly in her evolving understanding of familial obligations and the complexities of human relationships. Her development throughout the narrative highlights themes of empathy, resilience, and the capacity for change.

Overall, Aarti in Rama Chandra Behera's short story is portrayed as a multifaceted character who navigates personal reservations, familial dynamics, and unexpected encounters with a blend of strength, empathy, and gradual understanding. Her character contributes to the narrative's exploration of themes such as family bonds, cultural differences, and the transformative power of empathy in human interactions.

15.7.3 JITU

1. **Young and Vulnerable**:Jitu is a young boy encountered by the narrator and Aarti on a crowded bus. He is described as weeping because he has lost his father, Digambar Das, in the crowd.His vulnerability is immediately apparent, as he navigates the unfamiliar and potentially frightening situation of being separated from his father.

2. **Resilient and Brave**:Despite his young age and the distress of losing his father, Jitu demonstrates resilience. He maintains composure and trust in adults around him, particularly the narrator and Aarti.His willingness to accept the narrator's offer of help and his ability to find comfort despite the uncertainty showcase his inner strength and bravery.

3. **Dependent on Adult Support**:Throughout the story, Jitu relies on the narrator and Aarti for guidance and reassurance. He accepts their care and protection as they navigate the journey together, highlighting his dependence on adult figures in times of crisis.

4. **Symbol of Connection and Empathy**:Jitu serves as a catalyst for empathy and compassion in the narrative. His presence prompts the narrator and Aarti to extend their concern beyond their own family's journey and towards the well-being of a stranger.Through Jitu, the story explores themes of human connection and the transformative power of empathy, illustrating how chance encounters can lead to meaningful acts of kindness and understanding.

5. **Impact on Other Characters**:Jitu's presence has a profound impact on both the narrator and Aarti. They initially view him as a responsibility but gradually develop genuine empathy and care towards him.His character contributes to the narrative's exploration of familial bonds, societal expectations, and the complexities of human relationships in a diverse and interconnected world.

In summary, Jitu in Rama Chandra Behera's "The Passenger" is portrayed as a young, vulnerable, yet resilient boy whose presence evokes empathy and compassion from those around him. His character embodies themes of courage, trust, and the capacity for connection across social and cultural boundaries, enriching the story with its exploration of human empathy and unexpected encounters during a rural journey.

15.8 LET US SUM UP

Rama Chandra Behera's "The Passenger" is a poignant exploration of family dynamics, empathy, and cultural contrasts set against the backdrop of a rural journey. Through nuanced characters and insightful storytelling, Behera invites readers to

contemplate themes of responsibility, empathy, and the transformative power of human connections in navigating life's challenges. The story resonates with its portrayal of ordinary moments imbued with profound meaning, offering a reflection on the complexities of contemporary Indian society and the enduring values of compassion and understanding.

15.9 REFERENCE

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOdqmBUxgvI

LESSON 16: KALKI- THE POISON CURE

16.1 AUTHOR INTRODUCTION

Kalki R Krishnamurthy (1899-1954) was an iconic writer, a pioneer of modem Tamil literature and journalism. His induction into journalism was facilitated by his involvement with the freedom struggle. Beginning his career in the scholarly journal *Navasakti* and the anti-liquor manifesto *Vimochanam*, he served as Editor, *Ananda Vikatan,* before launching *Kalki,* the eponymous nationalist weekly. A prolific writer, he turned out, along with novels and short stories, political essays, reformist propaganda, travelogues, music and dance critiques, film reviews, biographies, scathing satire, humorous essays, songs, poems, a film script or two, and translation, including Mahatma Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments With Truth. His well known works include Alai Osai, Ponniyin Selvan and Sivakamiyin Sapatham.*

16.2 SUMMARY

The story is set during the British colonial period in India, focusing on the plight of Indian villagers who endure exploitation and injustice under colonial rule. The protagonist, often representing the oppressed masses, confronts the oppressive practices imposed by the British authorities. The narrative unfolds against the backdrop

of a rural village where the villagers suffer from economic hardships and social injustices inflicted by the colonial administration.

The story portrays the villagers' collective struggle against the exploitative policies of the British, highlighting their resilience and determination to resist oppression. The protagonist emerges as a symbol of defiance and courage, leading efforts to unite the villagers in a movement against colonial tyranny.

As tensions escalate, the story reaches its climax with a dramatic confrontation between the villagers and the British authorities. The villagers, emboldened by their collective strength and determination, confront the oppressors with a renewed sense of solidarity and purpose.

Through its vivid portrayal of social injustice and the spirit of resistance, "The Poison Cure" underscores the themes of national identity, cultural pride, and the quest for freedom. Kalki Krishnamurthy's narrative style and evocative storytelling captivate readers, offering a poignant reflection on the struggles and sacrifices endured by Indians during the fight against colonial domination.

In essence, "The Poison Cure" remains a timeless work that celebrates the indomitable spirit of resistance and the enduring quest for justice and equality in the face of adversity.

16.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

This story titled ‘The Poison Cure’ is set against the backdrop of the Indian Independence Movement. It was penned by Kalki the famous Tamil fiction writer in the year 1925, around the time Mahatma Gandhi gave the call for a Non-Cooperation Movement against the British rule in India. Kalki was a true nationalist and took an active part in the freedom struggle. He was also a great admirer of Mahatma Gandhi and opposed all the social and cultural evils highlighted by Gandhi. One of these was the social evil of untouchability. Untouchability was practiced by the higher caste Hindus in the Indian scenario. They opposed the lower caste and treated them as sub-human entities in the Hindu social structure. ‘The Poison Cure’ is a direct hit at the social evil of untouchability where Kalki proves through a parable-like tale, that every person is made

in the image and likeness of God and there should be no discrimination against anyone on any grounds.

'The Poison Cure' is the story of Narayan Iyer, a man who was religious, devoted to children, and had the skill to chant a mantra or a series of mantras or incantations to draw the poison from a person afflicted by snakebite or a scorpion sting. This was something connected to his piety and his religious lifestyle. However, he believed that if an untouchable crossed his path or was in the vicinity while he was chanting his incantations, everything would fail and the person with the sting or bite would surely die.

Already we get the idea that the story is a parable to teach us a moral. Here is a pious man who also happens to be an ardent Gandhian. He admires Gandhi and approves of all of Gandhi's statements and stands, except Gandhi's stand on untouchability. Narayan Iyer indeed believed that the untouchables were of a lower breed of human beings! Nothing can be more incorrect and that is proven in the story through the presence of the Postal Inspector Pedda Perumal Pillai. Pillai was present when Narayan Iyer was saving a young twenty-year-old man from a deadly snakebite. The Postal Inspector was a person of a higher social class than Narayan Iyer, who was a plain postmaster and teacher. He was more educationally qualified than the narrator of this story who was a student of Narayan Iyer. However, because Pillai was an untouchable or from the untouchable caste, his position in Indian society was considered to be lower than that of Iyer who was a Brahmin, despite the clear social class difference.

Mahatma Gandhi was totally against the caste system and so is Kalki. I would like to add here that this whole scenario seems very similar to even modern-day Indian society where we still practice untouchability. Also, this 'odd feeling' of an untouchable still being recognized as one despite his education, his elitist decorum, et al., is something which every Other Backward Class (OBC), Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and other Dalit classes face even today in twenty first century India. Well, here we have a twentieth-century Kalki trying to teach us very bluntly through subtle satire that the twenty-year-old man was saved despite the presence of Pillai. Notice that Pillai stays where he was as a superior officer despite Narayan Iyer

ordering that no lower caste person should be present while he conducted his peculiar, but effective ritual. Pillai does this because:

- He is not a believer in superstitions and is sure that the boy will be saved despite his presence in the area.
- That the Divine Powers do not segregate between humans so they will not thwart the incantation.
- He was a superior officer and so had to be present during the incantation.

As the story goes, naturally the youth is saved. Moral of the parable, in a very satirical fashion with a direct hint of sadism, is that that the presence of untouchables doesn't thwart incantations. Notice that there are two superstitious acts present in this story:

- The practice of untouchability.
- The incantations of Narayan Iyer.

From these two, the first is unfounded but the sad part of our society is that we feel the second one is more bogus of the two. Kalki through his satirical story tries, using a double 'superstitious' angle, to bring out the hypocrisy of the caste system and the system of untouchability. The reaction of Iyer at first is immediate justification which is then thrown out of the window for a clear understanding. The scales fall from his eyes and he now believes in the brotherhood of humankind as preached by Gandhi.

Thus, the 'cure' for the 'poison' of untouchability is deftly handled in this story by Kalki, one of the greatest Tamil writers of the previous century.

There are a few takeaways from this short story titled 'The Poison Cure' which are as follows:

- Narayan Iyer knew a lot about sacred literature which is filled to the brim with banal ideas about the lower status of certain sections of the Hindu population.
- Kalki had no good word for the bureaucracy especially when he mentions how Narayan Iyer is harassed by them. The bureaucracy was a product of the British.
- After Narayan Iyer would cure victims of snake bites and scorpion stings, he would be left with terrible migraine headaches indicative that he took on the pain of the

bite in a distilled form on himself. This is a very ancient art practiced by witch doctors across cultures.

- The ‘poison’ in this story could be the British Rule and the ‘cure’ on a larger surmise could be Indians giving up old superstitious beliefs and instead, following Gandhian ways.
- Narayan Iyer was a lover of Mahatma Gandhi, but one cannot be a true Gandhian if one still holds on to the caste system.

“Our struggle does not end so long as there is a single human being considered untouchable on account of his birth.” —Mahatma Gandhi

16.4 THEMES

16.4.1 COLONIAL OPPRESSION AND RESISTANCE

One of the central themes of "The Poison Cure" is the resistance against colonial oppression. The story is set during the British colonial period in India, where the protagonists, often representing ordinary citizens or oppressed groups, confront the injustices and exploitations imposed by the colonial rulers. This theme resonates strongly throughout Kalki's works as he often depicted the struggles and sacrifices of Indians under British rule.

16.4.2 SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

The story addresses issues of social justice and equality, highlighting the disparities and injustices faced by marginalized communities. Kalki portrays characters who challenge the social hierarchy and advocate for fairness and equality, reflecting his progressive views on social reform and human rights.

16.4.3 IDENTITY AND CULTURAL PRIDE

"The Poison Cure" explores themes of identity and cultural pride, particularly in the context of Indian nationalism and the preservation of indigenous values. The protagonists often embrace their cultural heritage and traditions as a form of resistance against colonial attempts to suppress or marginalize native identities.

16.4.4 POLITICAL AWAKENING AND ACTIVISM

The story reflects the period of political awakening and activism during India's struggle for independence. Characters in "The Poison Cure" are often portrayed as actively participating in nationalist movements or advocating for political change, emphasizing the importance of collective action and solidarity in achieving freedom and self-determination.

16.5 NARRATIVE STYLE AND TECHNIQUES

16.5.1 CHARACTERIZATION

Kalki's characters are often multifaceted and represent various facets of society, from oppressed individuals to heroic figures leading resistance movements. Their interactions and personal journeys drive the narrative forward, offering insights into the socio-political landscape of colonial India.

16.5.2 SYMBOLISM AND ALLEGORY

Symbolism plays a significant role in Kalki's storytelling, with objects, settings, and characters often carrying deeper metaphorical meanings. These symbols enrich the narrative by conveying complex ideas and emotions, allowing readers to interpret the story on multiple levels.

16.5.3 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The story is grounded in a specific historical context—the British colonial era in India. Kalki meticulously portrays the socio-economic and political conditions of the time, providing readers with a vivid depiction of the challenges faced by Indians under colonial rule.

16.6 IMPACT AND LEGACY

16.6.1 LITERARY SIGNIFICANCE

"The Poison Cure" is celebrated for its powerful portrayal of colonial oppression, social justice, and the resilience of the human spirit. Kalki's masterful storytelling and compelling narratives continue to resonate with readers, inspiring discussions on nationalism, identity, and the quest for freedom.

16.6.2 CULTURAL RELEVANCE

The story remains culturally relevant as it reflects enduring themes of social justice and resistance against oppression. Kalki's exploration of these themes contributes to a broader understanding of India's historical struggle for independence and its impact on contemporary socio-political discourse.

In conclusion, "The Poison Cure" by Kalki Krishnamurthy is a poignant and thought-provoking short story that addresses themes of colonial oppression, social justice, and national identity. Through its vivid characters and evocative narrative, the story continues to captivate readers and inspire critical reflection on the complexities of India's historical and cultural landscape.

16.7 LET US SUM UP

"The Poison Cure" is a story set during the British colonial period in India, focusing on the plight of Indian villagers who face exploitation and injustice. The protagonist, representing the oppressed masses, confronts the British authorities, highlighting their resilience and determination. The story highlights themes of national identity, cultural pride, and the quest for freedom. Kalki Krishnamurthy's narrative style and storytelling captivate readers, celebrating the spirit of resistance and the enduring quest for justice and equality in the face of adversity.

16.8 REFERENCE

https://www.insaneowl.com/the-poison-cure-by-kalki-r-krishnamurthy-short-story-analysis/

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LESSON 17 KHUSWANT SINGH- KARMA

17.1 AUTHOUR INTRODUCTION

Khushwant Singh FKC (born Khushal Singh, 2 February 1915 – 20 March 2014) was an Indian author, lawyer, diplomat, journalist and politician. His experience in the 1947 Partition of India inspired him to write *Train to Pakistan* in 1956 (made into film in 1998), which became his most well-known novel.

Born in Punjab, Khushwant Singh was educated in Modern School, New Delhi, St. Stephen's College, and graduated from Government College, Lahore. He studied at King's College London and was awarded an LL.B. from University of London. He was called to the bar at the London Inner Temple. After working as a lawyer in Lahore High Court for eight years, he joined the Indian Foreign Service upon the Independence of India from British Empire in 1947. He was appointed journalist in the All India Radio in 1951, and then moved to the Department of Mass Communications of UNESCO at Paris in 1956. These last two careers encouraged him to pursue a literary career. As a writer, he was best known for his trenchant secularism, humour, sarcasm and an abiding love of poetry. His comparisons of social and behavioural characteristics of Westerners and Indians are laced with acid wit. He served as the editor of several literary and news magazines, as well as two newspapers, through the 1970s and 1980s. Between 1980 and 1986 he served as Member of Parliament in Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the Parliament of India.

Khushwant Singh was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1974; however, he returned the award in 1984 in protest against Operation Blue Star in which the Indian Army raided Amritsar. In 2007, he was awarded the Padma Vibhushan, the second-highest civilian award in India.

17.2 WORK INTRODUCTION

The story Karma demonstrates the famous proverb “Pride comes before a fall”. The word Karma in Hindu theology means good or bad luck, viewed as ensuing from one’s action. Karma is about Sir Mohan Lal who always clinches the English ways and culture. Mohan Lal is a vizier and a barrister. Mohan Lal’s wife Lachmi is quite contrast

to him. They both live in the same house but in different floor. They travel in the same train but in different compartment. She passively follows him, almost unwillingly or without any mental attachment. She feels that her relationship with her master and servant devoid of any emotional bond. Sir Mohan Lal always humiliates his wife. At last he was also humiliated by the British soldiers in the train.

17.3 SUMMARY

Karma is a short story written by Kushwantsingh.It is a first class waiting room at the railway station. Sir Mohan Lal is found standing before the mirror. The mirror is worn-out and partly broken. He hates the mirror as he hates everything of India. But he admires his own appearance. He looks perfectly like a sahib. The train is yet to come. He calls the bearer and orders a drink.

Outside the waiting room, Lachmi, his wife is sitting on a small grey steel trunk. She is chewing a betel leaf. She is a traditional Indian woman and is commonly dressed. She requests a coolie to carry her luggage to the end of the platform. She will get into the inter-class woman compartment. She is not allowed to accompany her husband in the first class compartment, because her husband is a high government official, a barrister.

He will meet many officials in the compartment. But Lachmi cannot speak English and does not know their ways. Obviously, she cannot travel with her husband. She hardly enjoys the company of her husband. He visits her rarely at night. Then Lachmi plays the role of a passive partner. They have no child.

The train arrives at the platform. Lachmi enters the inter-class compartment. It is almost empty. She prepares some betel-leaves and starts chewing one.

There is a lot of noise. Passengers are jostling on the platform. Sir Mohan Lal totally detests them. He is calm and quiet. He is still enjoying his drink. He has spent five years in Oxford University. He strictly follows the manners of the English. He rarely speaks Hindustani. He speaks in English with a foreign accent. He can talk on any subject like a cultured Englishman.

Indeed, he always feels at home with the English. He expects some Englishmen as co-passengers. In that case it will be an enjoyable journey for him. But he shows no

sign of urge to talk to the English like most of the Indians. He pretends to read The Times. He has already his Balliol tie. He orders whisky. And lastly, he opens his gold cigarette case full of English cigarettes. He knows well that all these things will automatically arrest the attention of the Englishmen. Now he recalls his five-year glorious life of England.

He loves everything of the country. Even the prostitutes of England are more charming to him than his wife Lachmi. However, Sir Mohan enters his reserved first class coupe. It is empty and so he is sad. He begins to read The Times. Just then two English soldiers appear. They are looking for a suitable compartment. Sir Mohan is ready to welcome them. The two soldiers ultimately choose Sir Mohan's compartment.

But they order him to get out from the compartment. Though it is reserved, the soldiers do not care for it. Sir Mohan protests mildly. His royal English, sahib like appearance and The Times come of no use. The soldiers throw all the belongings of Sir Mohan out of the train. Finally they push him out of the train. The train quickly passes the station leaving him on the platform. His wife, totally unaware of his condition, chews the betel leaves, spits and sends a jet of red dribble flying across like a dart.

17.4 THE FEATURES

The word *karma* is a Sanskrit one and literally means destiny. It also has a Hindu theological idea, but it has been used as the title of the story only to speak about the identity crisis of a person who blindly imitates the western culture and fashion under the impact of British colonialism in India.

Irony forms one of the basic characteristics in Khushwant Singh's style of writing. The consequence of Sir Mohan's babu-culture is ironical. The irony lies in the fact that he is neither a British nor an Indian. He has no real identity. He himself has lost it. Khushwant Singh has portrayed a deep ironical view of the world around him through this story.

Mohan Lal and Lachmi are totally opposite characters though they are couple to each other. Mohan Lal is a blind follower of the English culture, whereas his wife Lachmi

is a typical Indian woman. Finally, Mohan Lal loses his identity, but Lachmi has no such crisis.

Through this story, Khushwant Singh warns us against our false belief in foreign excellence. It teaches us not to cut our roots off with our own soil, men and civilization. Otherwise, we are sure to face humiliation and tragic doom.

The story shows Khushwant Sing's art of presenting the psychological aspects of human beings nicely. His power to study of man is as remarkable here as the glamour of his linguistic style to present them vividly.

17.5 ANALYSIS

Khushwant Singh is a prominent Indian Journalist and writer. He worked as the editor of Illustrated Weekly, National Herald, and Hindustan Times etc. He also wrote books like History of the Sikhs, Train to Pakistan, End of India, A Bride for the Sahib and other stories, Burial at Sea, In the company of Women, Love, Truth and a Little Malice, etc. He received both the Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan awards.

The Short story Karma is taken from his book, The Collected storied published in 1989. The story Karma demonstrates the famous proverb "Pride comes before a fall". The word Karma in Hindu theology means good or bad luck, viewed as ensuing from one's action. The story proves his fate no doubt ironical, but cruel enough. The title Karma is thus quite considerable as it depictions the result of Sir Mohan's own action. Khushwant Singh's confirms the art of presenting the psychological aspects of human beings.

Karma is about Sir Mohan Lal who always clinches theEnglish ways and culture. Mohan Lal is a vizier and abarrister. His every activity proves his reservation on Englishlike using English Cigarette, Whiskey, The Times Newspaperand Clothing. The author introduces Sir Mohan Lal, in front ofthe mirror, reveling in his Saville Row suit and how British heactually smells.

> Sir Mohan smiled at the mirror with an air of pity andpatronage. 'You are so very much like everything else inthis country, inefficient, dirty, indifferent, he murmured.The mirror smiled back at Sir Mohan. 'You are a

> bit ofall right, old chap, it said 'Distinguished efficient- evenhandsome. That neatly trimmed moustache- the suit fromSaville Row with the carnation in the buttonhole- thearoma of eau de cologne talcum powder and scentedsoap all about you! Yes, old fellow, you are a bit of all right.

Mohan Lal's wife Lachmi is quite contrast to him. She is atypical Indian house wife. The author introduces her in a dirty white saree with a red border. She is munching betel leaves

and also gossiping with the bearer of the coolie. She is eatingChapaties and Mango pickle on the railway platform.

> She wore a dirty white sari with a red border. On oneside of her nose glistened a diamond nose-ring, and shehad several gold bangles on her arms. She had been talking to the bearer until Sir Mohan had summoned him inside. As soon as he had gone, she hailed a passing railway coolie. The coolie flattened his turban to make a cushion, histed the steel trunk on his head, and moved down the platform. Lady Lal picked up her brass tiffin carrier and ambled along behind him. ON the way she stopped by a hawker's stall to replenish her silver betel leaf case, and then joined the coolie, she sat down on her steel trunk and started talking to him
>
> 'Are you travelling alone sister?' Coolie asked Lachmi.
>
> 'No, I am with my master, brother. He is in the waiting room. He travels first class. He is a vizier and a barrister, and meets so many officers and Englishmen in the trains and I am only a native woman. I can't understand English and don't know their ways, so I keep to my Zenana inter-class.'(P.No-2)

They both live in the same house but in different floor. Mohan Lal is in the ground floor and his wife in the first floor. They travel in the same train but in different compartment. He dislikes her. She passively follows him, almost unwillingly or without

any mental attachment. She feels that her relationship with her master and servant devoid of any emotional bond.

The theme divided into many sub-layers- Imitation offoreign culture, unhappy married life, contrast of culture and

life style and Aristocracy and patriotism. In this short story,Khuswant Singh focuses the irony of Sir Mohan Lal. He feelsproud after boarding the first class compartment. He is verydelighted at the thought of talking of an English man. But hispridedoes not continue. Two British soldiers start to abusehim in the compartment. They called him a nigger. Heattempts to oppose them. They toss all his belongings out ofthe train and pushed him out of the compartment.

> ‘Ere, Bill, he shouted, ‘one ere’.
>
> His companion came up, also looked in, and looked atSir Mohan.
>
> ‘Get the nigger out’, he muttered to his companion.
>
> They opened the door, and turned to the half smiling,half protesting Sir Mohan.
>
> ‘Reserved!’ yelled Bill.
>
> ‘Janta-Reserved . Army-Fauj,’ exclaimed Jim, pointingto his Khaki shirt.
>
> ‘Ek Dum jao- get out!’
>
> They picked up Sir Mohan’s suitcase and flung it on theplatform. Then followed his thermos flask, briefcase,bedding and The Times. sir Mohan was livid with rage.
>
> ‘Preposterous, preposterous,’ he shouted , hoarse withanger.‘I’ll have you arrested-guard, guard!’ (P.No-7).

The irony is complete when Mohan Lal has to stand on theplatform watching the train speed past with his wife on board.

> Sir Mohan’s feet were glued to the earth and he lost hisspeech. He started at the lighted windows of the train...In the inter class zenana

compartment was Lachmi, fairand fat, on whose nose the diamond nose-ring glistenedagainst the station lights. Her mouth was bloated withbetel saliva which she had been storing up to spit as soonas the train had cleared the station. As the train sped pastthe lighted part of the platform, Lady Lal spat and sent ajet of red dribble flying across like a dart(P.No-8).

In the story Karma, Sir Mohan Lal, an upper-class Indianwho hates his native country men because of his knowledge inEnglish. He always humiliates his wife because of herdressing and culture. At the end of the story, Sir Mohan Lalwas pitifully humiliated by two British soldiers on histravelling in train.

17.6 CHARACTERS

17.6.1 SIR MOHAN LAL

A high-ranking government official and barrister.Educated in England (oxford university) for five years, he embodies the anglophile mindset.despises everything Indian and prefers English manners and culture.proud of his appearance resembling a British sahib.acts superior to his surroundings, expecting to mingle with Englishmen.is snubbed and ejected from his first-class compartment by English soldiers, despite his protests and possessions.

17.6.2 LACHMI

Sir Mohan Lal's traditional Indian wife.sits outside the first-class waiting room on a small trunk, chewing betel leaves.cannot travel with her husband due to her lack of English language skills and unfamiliarity with English customs.passively accepts her husband's neglect and the unequal treatment she receives due to her traditional role and lack of education.

17.7 THEMES

17.7.1 COLONIAL MENTALITY AND IDENTITY

Sir Mohan Lal's character embodies the internalized superiority complex common among the educated elite in British India. his disdain for Indian culture and preference

for everything English reflects a deeper identity crisis and aspiration towards assimilation with the colonizer.

17.7.2 GENDER AND SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Lachmi's character highlights the subordinate role of women in traditional Indian society and the cultural divide within the couple. her inability to accompany her husband due to social and linguistic barriers underscores the gendered dynamics and restrictions of the time.

17.7.3 CULTURAL ALIENATION

The stark contrast between Sir Mohan Lal's admiration for English culture and his rejection of his own roots illustrates the alienation experienced by many Indians who were educated in western institutions during the colonial era. his ultimate rejection from the first-class compartment by English soldiers highlights the fragility of his perceived status and acceptance.

17.8 IRONY AND SATIRE

The narrative employs irony to critique Sir Mohan Lal's misplaced admiration forEnglish culture and his subsequent humiliation, contrasting it with Lachmi's simple, unaffected presence chewing betel leaves.

Overall, this passage offers a critical examination of colonial attitudes, identity, and the complex interplay of gender and class dynamics in BritishIndia. it uses vivid characterizations and situational irony to convey its themes effectively.

17.9 LET US SUM UP

Karma is a short story by Kushwantsingh, set in a first-class waiting room at a railway station. Sir Mohan Lal, a sahib-like man, admires his appearance and admires his sahib-like appearance. His wife, Lachmi, is a traditional Indian woman who cannot accompany her husband in the first-class compartment due to his high government status. Lachmi is a passive partner and has no children. Upon arrival at the platform, Lachmi enters the inter-class compartment, chewing betel leaves. Sir Mohan is calm and quiet, enjoying his drink. He has spent five years at Oxford University and speaks

English with a foreign accent. He expects Englishmen as co-passengers, but shows no interest in talking to them. Sir Mohan enters his reserved first-class compartment, but two English soldiers arrive and order him to leave. The soldiers throw all his belongings out of the compartment, leaving Sir Mohan on the platform. His wife, unaware of his condition, chews betel leaves, spits, and sends a red dribble across the platform.

17.10 REFERENCE

https://www.scribd.com/presentation/464006569/Karma-by-Khushwant-Singh
https://www.studienet.dk/karma-khushwant-singh/summary

Self Assessment Questions:

2 marks

5.1

Explain how Muni's character subvert the traditional notion of the "hero" in literature.

Muni's character subverts the traditional notion of the "hero" by being a simple, humble, and unassuming villager who doesn't embark on a grand journey or achieve extraordinary feats. Instead, he finds joy and contentment in his everyday life, challenging the conventional idea of heroism.

Analyze the symbolism of the horse and two goats in relation to the concept of "dharma" in Hinduism.

The horse and two goats symbolize Muni's dharma, or righteous way of living, which is rooted in his simple and self-sufficient life. The animals represent his connection to nature and his commitment to living a virtuous life, aligning with the Hindu concept of dharma.

5.2

Examine the ways in which the train journey serves as a metaphor for the protagonist's inner journey towards self-discovery.

The train journey represents the protagonist's inner journey towards self-discovery, as he navigates through different social classes and encounters various people, leading to a deeper understanding of himself and his place in society.

Discuss the implications of the story's exploration of social inequality in the context of India's caste system.

The story highlights the deep-seated social inequalities perpetuated by the caste system, revealing the harsh realities faced by marginalized communities. It emphasizes the need for empathy and understanding in bridging the social divide.

5.3

Elucidate how the story's use of magical realism comment on the tensions between tradition and modernity in Indian society.

The story's use of magical realism highlights the tensions between tradition and modernity by showcasing the protagonist's transformation, which serves as a metaphor for the clash between old beliefs and new ideas, ultimately revealing the need for balance and harmony.

Investigate the ways in which the protagonist's transformation serves as a critique of patriarchal norms in Indian culture.

The protagonist's transformation critiques patriarchal norms by challenging traditional gender roles and expectations, as he embraces a more empathetic and nurturing approach, subverting the conventional masculine ideal.

5.4

Examine the ways in which the story's exploration of karma serves as a commentary on the consequences of colonialism in India.

The story's exploration of karma serves as a commentary on the consequences of colonialism, highlighting the cyclical nature of violence and oppression, and emphasizing the need for self-reflection and accountability.

Discuss the implications of Mohan Lal's character in relation to the concept of "otherness" in postcolonial literature.

Mohan Lal's character represents the "other," embodying the complexities of identity and belonging in a postcolonial context. His experiences serve as a commentary on the tensions between cultural heritage and colonial legacy, highlighting the need for understanding and empathy.

5 marks

1. Assume you are Muni, the protagonist of "A Horse and Two Goats". Compare your simple life with the complexities of the American's world in the story.
2. Discover the symbolism behind the horse and two goats in R. K. Narayan's "A Horse and Two Goats". List the ways in which they represent Muni's journey.
3. Prove that the train journey is a metaphor for life's journey in Rama Chandra Behera's "The Passenger". Compile evidence from the story to support your argument.
4. Compose a character sketch of the protagonist in "The Passenger" by Rama Chandra Behera. Propose a solution to his struggles with social inequality.
5. Combine the themes of superstition and reason in Kalki's "The Poison Cure". Choose a side to argue for and provide evidence from the story.
6. Determine the author's message in "The Poison Cure" by Kalki. List the ways in which the protagonist's journey represents a transformation from traditional to modern beliefs.
7. Presume Mohan Lal's character in Khuswant Singh's "Karma" and propose a solution to his karma. Compare his past and present selves.
8. Compile evidence from "Karma" by Khuswant Singh to prove the consequences of one's actions. Choose a quote that represents the theme of karma.

8 marks

1. Compare and contrast the themes of cultural clash in R. K. Narayan's "A Horse and Two Goats" and social inequality in Rama Chandra Behera's "The Passenger". How do the protagonists in both stories navigate their respective challenges?
2. Analyze the symbolism of the horse and two goats in "A Horse and Two Goats" and the train journey in "The Passenger". How do these symbols relate to the themes of identity and belonging in both stories?
3. Discuss the role of superstition in Kalki's "The Poison Cure" and its consequences on the protagonist's life. How does this relate to the theme of karma in Khuswant Singh's "Karma"?
4. Compose a character sketch of Muni from "A Horse and Two Goats" and the protagonist from "The Passenger". How do their experiences with cultural clash and social inequality shape their worldviews?
5. Propose a solution to the conflicts faced by the protagonists in "The Poison Cure" and "Karma". How can they balance traditional beliefs with modern values and find a sense of belonging?